

THE
PRINCESS
AND THE CLOWNS
JEAN-JOSE FRAPPA





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✓ THE PRINCESS AND THE CLOWNS

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THE PRINCESS
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CHAPTER I

WE are, in truth, living in an epoch that is strangely chaotic, but I am not one of those who curse and condemn it hopelessly as being pitiless, disastrous and dull, for it possesses, in my eyes, the rare merit of having, by a series of catastrophies and calamities assuredly regrettable in themselves, resuscitated that charming goddess whose adepts had no longer any way of honoring her; I refer to "Adventure."

This epoch has first permitted several peaceful citizens to become heroes, to which rank they never thought themselves destined; it has moreover, brought a certain number of individuals out of immutable and monotonous situations into which blind fate had plunged them, and in which they had prepared themselves to be bored for the rest of their lives, prey to that

malady called neurasthenia which grows out of *the impossibility of the unforeseen* which is the evil of organized society. And, by acting in this way, it has performed an act of piety.

I know that a great number of my readers will not share my opinion and that, if I may hope for the approbation of people formerly poor who have become rich, I may anticipate also the reproaches and maledictions of the former rich who have become poor. But I care not, being persuaded that the latter do not express by their lamentations the real sentiments of their souls, and that they have, on the contrary, found once more, in the condition into which they have been cast by the world-war followed by the downfall of Russian capital, the true joy of living, in learning at last to know on the one hand regret, which is really nothing but the retrospective enjoyment of the wordly goods the full value of which they did not formerly appreciate; and on the other hand hope, the anticipated enjoyment of those who aspire toward acquirement.

However this may be, and in order not to begin a sterile polemic of which the first effect would be to disgust those who had planned to

read this book, let us establish simply and without comment the rebirth of adventure at a time when everything seemed to presage the extreme classification of people, ideas, talents and theories.

Never, in truth, has one seen so many mysterious disappearances or unexpected returns, astonishing downfalls and prodigious promotions, obscure births and non-certified deaths, in fact, such things as make the registrars, men who are usually so harmoniously well-balanced, lose their heads.

From this are drawn a bewildering series of romances still unknown to the public, for their unlikelihood has made the boldest writers draw back, for truth knows no limits when it puts on the rags of fiction.

As for me, who know not how to imagine and consequently feels no jealousy as an author when faced by the fancies of human destiny and the fantastic blows of fate, I do not hesitate to undertake to-day the recital of a curious story, of which I guarantee the authenticity at the risk of provoking the protestations and contradictions of the little kingdom of Georgia, friend of France.

THE heroine of this story was the most gracious Princess Olga, second cousin of his Majesty the Czar Nicholas II.

Daughter of the commander in chief of the Cossacks of Adour, the Grand Duke Alexander Dimitrievitch, who died shortly before the war, the Princess Olga had managed, thanks to great energy, intelligence and courage, to flee from Russia with her mother, the Grand-Duchess Marie Nicolævna and a few of their followers, at the moment when the Bolshevik disturbance was sweeping away ancient society. Extensive investments, previously made in foreign countries, assured the two ladies, if not the pompous life of former times, at least a fortune, permitting them to hold their rank in the world, and even to help a certain number of noble refugees less favored than themselves.

They had first taken refuge in Sweden, but the Grand-Duchess Marie, who was a nice plump lady both heedless and jovial, adoring light reading, vodka and Corona cigars, was not long in tiring of the high society that she found much too cold and where her rather free manners brought her a stiff reception. She had

then taken her daughter to England, but, soon shocked by that court so democratic in its tendencies, she had, at last, decided to establish herself in Paris, where there exist numerous clans of fashionable men thirsting for the chance of calling someone "My Lord" or "Your Highness," and elegant women, who, being the daughters of big industrial magnates, and having by marriage acquired aristocratic names, feel in their plebeian legs the keen desire to make courtesies.

Marie Nicolævna was perfectly happy, spending her time at receptions, teas, artistic sorées, relating untiringly the moving vicissitudes of her escape, during which, a moujik, filled with good intentions but wishing to procure some democratic satisfaction, had stipulated, as a return for having helped the fugitives across a river, that the Duchess kiss him on both cheeks.

"And he had a frightful beard, my dear."

But if her mother spent agreeable and care-free days, on the contrary Princess Olga Alexandrowna was bored and put up badly with her new environment.

She was, in 1920, at the time when the as-

tonishing events that I am going to relate to you took place, a young girl of twenty-two years of age, tall and slender, with a face that was charmingly framed by fluffy blonde hair. Into her large blue eyes that had a sweet and far-away look, sometimes crept the shadow of a nostalgic dream. She had a noble and languorous bearing, a kind although slightly haughty expression, and a tired smile, that smile of etiquette, behind which is hidden, enigmatical and alluring, the soul of little princesses.

Although of a fairly even disposition, she had, nevertheless, little angry outbursts of short duration, and, in spite of her generous impulses, spoke occasionally in a harsh and cutting way to her inferiors, when she imagined that they failed her in any respect. Romantic and sentimental, she often fell into long dreamy reveries, overpowered by thoughts of which she never divulged the secret to the Grand Duchess, her mother, who was annoyed by her far-away meditations. But when she caught herself allowing her imagination to wander, she blushed and called herself sharply to account, for this

languidness seemed to her unworthy of a person of her rank.

In short, one could discover in Princess Olga all the physical and moral signs of an ardent, impulsive personality, in love with life, but unceasingly restrained by prejudices of caste and the profound conviction of being modelled of other clay than the ordinary run of mortals.

She did not delight in the fact of her imperial origin, no, she even frequently deplored it, but how could she help it? It was something that must be accepted with all its consequences.

Please do not tax her with pride and haughtiness, no one, on the contrary, aimed at greater simplicity; only her simplicity was that of a goddess preoccupied with not frightening the ephemeral race of men.

Therefore, Olga Alexandrowna was bored. She regretted her former life, the gorgeous receptions at the Court, the reviews at which she figured on horseback by her father's side, the honors and above all the prerogatives of her rank, which compelled all heads, even the most rebellious, to bow as she passed. She suffered when she had to mix in a crowd, and was frankly astonished when she went out on foot not

to see the policemen stop the traffic as she went by.

What are the gods when they no longer command the thunder for their adoration? She dreamed of an early restoration, refused obstinately to believe in the death of the Imperial family, and, turn by turn, hung her tenacious hopes on the generous souls who proclaimed that they would shortly crush out bolshevism: Koltchak, Denikine, Wrangel or others.

But, let us get on with our story.

I told you just now that the Princess Olga was of a kindly and generous nature; she proved it by interesting herself with meritorious ardor in all the Russian refugees whose misery was brought to her attention, or who made an appeal to her heart. Leaving her mother to discreetly help the aristocratic "émigrés," she did not hesitate to penetrate into the most sordid hovels, to bring to her house the most uncleanly children, in order to give them the proper care, to dress them, or to take them for automobile trips into the country. She patronized a hospital and visited the sick. De-

siours of encouraging all kinds of activities and of proving her spirit of solidarity, she never missed any exhibition of Moscovite painters or any new Russian ballet, and, if she learned that one of her compatriots was figuring in a theatrical performance of any kind, she hastened there to applaud him, whether it was at the Opera or in the most modest "café-concert."

That is why having heard one day that Michalis and Partner, two extraordinary clowns whose act was attracting all Paris to the Olympia, must be originally from Russia, she hastened to reserve the stage box in that big music-hall for the very next matinée.

Really, the success of Michalis and Partner fully justified itself, and for reasons entirely different from those which usually bring success to the eccentric Americans or Englishmen who make those entirely unexpected hits.

The former was a violinist whose virtuosity and genius in improvisation astonished musicians of the highest repute; the latter, an impersonator with moving face and vivid, pre-

cise gestures. Both of them possessed, each in his own way, the creative gift and, without scenery, playing alternately against a background of white and black material, without change of costumes, almost without accessories, they held the entire hall under their spell, moving the two thousand spectators with the same thrills, making them experience, turn by turn, the same sentiments of sadness, pity, love, or enthusiasm.

Michalis was above medium height, his face with its clean-cut features appeared distinguished, the make-up only serving to accentuate its characteristics, a high forehead, prominent arched eyebrows which shaded grave, imperiously attractive eyes that never laughed, prominent cheek-bones, hollow cheeks and full down-curving lips. An immovable face, undeniably handsome, but drawn by sickness or suffering, and in which one might have quickly lost interest, if, in that bluish shade between the eyebrows and the cheek-bones, there had not been that dark bewitching flame, that penetrating glance, through which passed without one being able to discover by what magic, all passions, all sorrows and all joys. It did not consist of

the "expression." No. That word can hardly be used when speaking of a face or a glance that does not change, but showed, successive projections of a strong, moving thought. . . . Yes, that was it exactly; two eyes like those of a fakir, casting a spell over a number of individuals, fascinating them and imposing upon them a dream-like revery. At that time, I had frequently been to see Michalis; I had been caught under that hallucinating spell of his glance in whatever section of the hall I happened to be seated, and I could find no other explanation for the discomfort, not lacking in charm however, that this impassible clown caused me with his blanched face appearing out of the ruffled collar of black muslin above a black satin costume.

As for his comrade, who had no other name than Partner, he presented a complete contrast to Michalis. Shorter, thick-set, dressed in white satin, he had the strange dark head of a Tartar, a trifle too large for his slim body, and long arms terminated by bony hands.

If the first was total immobility, the second was the essence of activity. Everything moved in his flat face, the thick tufted eyebrows, the

small bright eyes, the nostrils of his flattened nose, the wide-cut mouth and the flexible muscles of his cheeks.

The "act" on the program consisted of Michalis and Partner playing several scenes together, alternating with musical selections which Michalis gave by himself. In their scenes, which were very simple, while the first improvised a sort of an overture the second commenced tracing in space with his brown hands on the background of the white curtain, imaginary decorations which the audience finished by really seeing, so precise were the clown's gestures. Then began the plot, in which Partner impersonated all the characters. For instance they gave a scene of family life. Near the window, the old grandmother was stitching on the sewing-machine, a young girl at the other end of the room was practising on the piano, while the children played in the centre of the floor on their hands and knees.

Michalis imitated, turn by turn, on his violin, the different noises, and one heard the hum of the machine, the running of the scales on the piano, the laughter of the children, their disputes, the cuckoo clock striking the hours and

the cried of the street-venders outside. Partner, sometimes in one spot, sometimes in another, imitated the old short-sighted woman guiding her thread with difficulty, or threatening the children with a whip, the little girl applying herself to her practising, sticking her tongue out slightly, making faces as she executed the finger exercises on the key-board, the squabbles of the children pulling one another's hair, and the house-dog intervening in the dispute.

Suddenly the drama burst forth, brutal and rapid. One heard a great noise from the crowd outside, and harsh cries and then the father of the family bursts into the room, crazed and breathless. He quickly closes the door, pushes the bolts, and barricades it to resist the onrush from outside; alas, all in vain. The door is smashed to pieces, a commissioner of the Soviets enters followed by red soldiers who stab the unfortunate people with their bayonets, strangle the grandmother, throw the children out of the window and set fire to the house.

And Partner, transforming his face with disconcerting rapidity, acting one character, and

placing the other by gestures in front of him, imitated the terror of the father, the cold cruelty of the commissiонер, and the sanguinary rage of the soldiers, filling the entire stage himself, while the violin cried, howled, wept, wailed and railed. It was incredible, and the audience wildly applauded these astonishing artists.

Different scenes followed this one, sometimes comic, sometimes melancholy: a peasant in the clutches of a custom-house officer, a despairing man throwing himself into the water and whose body might be seen floating in the current; a poor wretch dying of hunger and hesitating to steal a loaf from the front of a bakery, and many others that it would take too long to enumerate here.

Between times, as I have already told you, Michalis stood in front of the black curtain from which it was hard to distinguish his costume—a little spot-light projected from the prompter's box, illuminating only his blanched face and flashing eyes—and improvised on the violin or the guitar, strange melodies of real artistic quality.

Such was, briefly described, the act of the

two clowns. I fear I have not been able in words to express its entire originality. One analyses with difficulty those fleeting impressions, the sublime work of those who create such ephemeral beauty out of musical vibrations, a gesture, a glance or a twitching of the face. These magicians are perhaps the only real artists, and that is why doubtless we need so many phrases to describe incompletely what they express in the space of that one intense moment during which they give out their whole emotion so that it pours out over their audience.

The Princess Olga Alexandrowna came therefore one afternoon to the Olympia, properly escorted by General Kameniski and Countess Orchapoff who, between them, constituted the military and civil house of the Grand Duchess, and they all took their places in the right-hand stage box. The program, admirably arranged, during which acrobats, dancers, equilibrists and comic singers succeeded each other, interested her greatly, but she waited with childish impatience for the "hit" of the show, the act of Michalis and Partner—and when, on

the illuminated signs, placed on either side of the stage, appeared the red number announcing this part of the program, she caught herself showing her pleasure by an exclamation, just like the crowd with which the hall was filled.

The lights were extinguished, the curtain raised, and on a black background appeared the blanched face of Michalis. At this vision the Princess was shaken by a quick shiver, inexplicable, but so violent that her attentive lady-in-waiting hastened to replace on her shoulders the cloak that she had, on sitting down, thrown on the back of her chair.

Olga thanked the Countess with a smile and began to follow with passionate interest the playing of the black clown who gave as a prelude the grand air of Pagliacci, in which he rendered with his bow the broken laugh mixed with sobs.

Then the white clown entered, the footlights became bright, the shadow curtain disappeared, and the young Princess felt the sense of discomfort that had come over her gradually fading away. But during the performance of the first great scene that I described to you just now, she paid no attention to Partner's

acting, being unable to take her eyes from the face of Michalis, who fine profile, especially the brow and nose, recalled to her vaguely another profile, that of a young man whose photograph was in her room. But there the resemblance ceased, "the other one" not having deep-set eyes, hollow cheeks and the bitter mouth of the musical clown. Nevertheless, during the space of a few minutes, a rush of memories submerged her soul and plunged her into a sad and melancholy frame of mind.

A tumult of applause announced the end of the sketch and brought her back to the sense of reality. Partner disappeared, the black curtain spread once more its heavy folds at the back of the stage, and Michalis advanced near the foot-lights, tuning his violin while casting his eyes over the spectators with an impressive glance.

It was then that the incident happened, the result of which was to have such great and extraordinary consequences.

The black clown, while placing against his neck the base of his instrument, turned his head slightly to insure the stability of the latter with his chin. He found himself then fac-

ing the stage-box, where the young girl was leaning forward, and suddenly he was seen to stagger; his right hand, already raised, let the bow fall and clutched at his ruffled collar trying to loosen it and, for the first time he lowered his eyelids.

There was a movement of emotion in the hall, and already Partner, who was standing behind a wing, thinking that his comrade was ill, ran up just as Michalis, whose face seemed suddenly more emaciated, pulled himself together, picked up his bow and calming the audience with a gesture, started the prelude with a hand trembling with emotion.

Contrary to his custom, he did not cast the sombre fire of his eyes over the hall, but fixed his glance on Olga Alexandrowna, and everyone understood that he was going to play for her.

The little Princess, embarrassed by this look and a trifle ashamed, for she felt herself the centre of attraction, wished to get up in order to withdraw to the back of the box or even to leave the hall, but a mysterious force nailed her to her chair; she remained there as if fas-

cinated, incapable of making the slightest movement.

Then, under the vibrant bow of the strange clown, the violin began to play a very slow air, which none who had attended the former shows of Michalis had ever heard, a melody, grave and nostalgic, the echo of a grief-laden soul.

At the very first notes, Olga's face became intensely pale; she now looked with fear at the chalky face turned toward her. At last, after a few minutes, the young girl was seen to pull herself up with an effort, wave her hands in the air and fall back with a great cry.

Some people got up, wondering what had happened, others ran toward the aisles, the doctor in charge broke through the crowd and penetrated into the box, while the manager of the music-hall, who happened to be present, hastened to re-establish order, saying to the audience who crowded into the lobby; "It is nothing. A little faintness."

Michalis, impassive, still played with an ardor that was almost mystic.

The Countess Orchapoff and the General Kameniski carried Princess Olga off to her carriage by supporting her under her arms.

She had recovered from her fainting spell, but was still shaken by a nervous trembling. The performance, disturbed for a moment, continued without another interruption.

The frequenters of the hall scarcely noticed that Michalis and Partner considerably shortened their act on that day.

CHAPTER II

IN the drawing room of her little "Villa Said," crowded with large armchairs, settees and lounges, into which at any time she would sink wailing, the Grand Duchess hovered around her daughter, who had scarcely yet recovered from her emotion.

"Well, my pretty one, are you going to tell me what has happened to you? Must I really drag the words from you by sheer force? Come now, this is ridiculous! Am I not your mother?"

Marie Nicolævna had banished Russian from her house, not wishing, for anything in the world, to use the same language as those ignoble bolshevists, Mr....Prenine...Lestine, Mr...Krosky, Rosky, Mr...Brassine, whose names she pretended to mispronounce.

Olga, annoyed by this maternal trepidation, replied:

"Nothing happened to me, Mother, I assure you. I had a slight giddy spell, that's all! . . . probably on account of the heat. Now it's all over."

"A slight giddy spell! . . . She faints and she calls that a slight giddy spell! . . . No, no, there is something else that you are hiding from me!"

"But what on earth do you think can have happened to me?"

"How do I know? You are always so secretive. Anyhow, one cannot get upset without a reason, especially you who are so strong. And, what's more, in a music-hall, to make a show of yourself! Besides, I see by your appearance that you are still quite unnerved. . . . Isn't she, Orchapoff? . . . Come, my dear, tell me quickly! I'm waiting.

"Once more, Mother. . . ."

"All right, all right! If you don't want to talk, I won't insist. I know very well that you have not the slightest confidence in me, and that you find me too stupid to tell me your thoughts, your pleasures or your troubles."

"Oh!"

"You consider me to be exactly like a child, in spite of the energy I showed during our flight!... Oh!... my heart is indeed heavy, Olga, that you should grieve me in this manner!"

The Princess shrugged her shoulders slightly. It was the eternal scene starting over again.

Marie Nicolævna, whose childish soul could not follow a serious idea for five minutes at a time, and who left to her daughter the care of managing their daily affairs, continually felt the imperative need of reproaching the latter, under no matter what pretext, for her own nonchalance and light characteristics. And this generally ended in floods of tears easily appeased, and followed then, for no reason whatsoever, by peals of laughter. To accomplish this, it sufficed for Olga to take her mother's head between her hands, kiss her on the brow and say:

"Come, little Mother, why do you torment yourself in this way? You know very well that I love you tenderly, and that I have the greatest admiration for your good sense. It is all of no importance whatever, just something about which I think it useless to worry you.

But rest assured that in case of anything serious, I shall never fail to have recourse to your wisdom."

The Grand Duchess then swallowed her tears and they talked of other things.

But, to-day, Olga was too preoccupied to accomplish the habitual rite; therefore, she remained pensive in her arm-chair. Seeing which, Marie Nicolævna decided of her own accord to stop the sobs that shook her plump frame. But it was only to start off again on another subject, and to begin an apology for herself, which was one way of finding consolation.

"I am quite sure that this abominable clown frightened you. Kameniski told me that he dared to look at you with most uncalled-for insistence, didn't you General?"

Kameniski and the Countess Orchapoff, who stood respectfully in a corner of the drawing-room, chimed in with her.

"And that upset you? Ah! you have no nerves, my child, allow me to tell you. Happily I did not show such weakness at the time of our escape. If I had fainted when that frightful moujik forced me to embrace him,

what would have become of us, I ask you? Isn't it true, General? Instead of that, I did not resist. I restrained the keen desire I had to horsewhip the insolent creature and, to save us all, I kissed his horrible beard which must have been full of lice. I did not get ill, although he smelt like a...a...What is the name of the husband of the goat in French, Orchapoff?"

"Le bouc, Madame."

"That's it; he smelt like a 'bouc.' Ah! I have more character than you, Olga, thanks be to God, although you may not think so. That is what the poor Czar Nicholas used to say: 'Marie, you must have a great deal of character to be able to hide it so well.' And he knew what he was talking about! Whereas you! just because a miserable clown dares to look at you insolently...Ah! if we were only in Russia, back in the time of the Empire, I swear to you, he would leave this very night for Siberia...But I shall telephone immediately to Police Headquarters, for I am sure he is a bolshevist, an 'eye' as they call them now."

She was on the point of getting up, but Princess Olga, anxious to stem the flood of

words, and feeling that things were going badly, decided to shake off her silence.

"Calm yourself, little Mother, I can assure you that this man has nothing to do with my sick spell. If it had been that, I would have told you so, and I would have appealed to your influence to have him chastised."

"But then," cried the Grand Duchess passing quickly to another feeling, "but then, you really are ill. Orchapoff, notify the Doctor. Great Heavens, my child is ill. Have them prepare her room quickly."

"No, no, don't worry, Mother darling, there is nothing the matter with me. A little rest will revive me entirely. I shall go up stairs and lie down for a few minutes, and soon I shall feel all right. Go for your walk in perfect tranquillity."

"Is what you are saying perfectly true, Olga?"

"Yes, Mother dear."

"Then I believe you. Gracious! how you upset me. Such emotions exhaust me. Orchapoff, pour out some vodka for me, and you, General, pass me the box of cigars."

A quarter of an hour later, the Grand Duch-

ess went out in an automobile to drive around the "Bois" and one could see her laughing heartily as she related some story to the respectfully attentive Orchapoff.

Free at last, the Princess ran quickly upstairs. Her room was gay and bright, overlooking the villa's little garden and from it you could see, through a space between the houses, a corner of the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne. Above the bed an ancient ikon cast into the shadow of an old-rose canopy, the scintillations of its dull gold, under the faint flickering of an altar-light that the young girl tendered personally.

Against the wall, on either side of the mantelpiece, were hung two men's portraits, the first, wearing the byzantine ducal coronet, the second the crown of a reigning prince. Beneath each of these photographs one saw on the broad white matting two upright official signatures: "Alexander," "Michel."

The one on the left represented the Grand Duke Alexander Dimitrievitch in his uniform as Ataman of the Cossacks of Adour: a large

bull-dog face, on which was the dark line of a drooping mustache, cold-looking eyes half hidden by heavy eyelids, a mouth with sensuous lips and a large jaw ending in a prominent chin.

The other was that of a man of about thirty years of age, whose hair, brushed up in front, framed a high brow and whose full blonde beard covered his cheeks. A distinguished face, that of an artist, extremely sympathetic, with dreamy, slightly melancholy eyes, a straight well-cut nose, and a mouth faintly shaded by a small mustache.

All over the room, on the furniture, on the mantelpiece, against the wall, were an innumerable quantity of souvenirs, knick-knacks rare or valueless, coming from Russia, even little rustic wooden toys, all of which denoted in Olga Alexandrowna, a passionate love for all that recalled her far-away country.

As she entered she made before the ikon, as was her custom, three rapid orthodox signs of the cross, and then let herself fall into a chair with her head between her hands. Then she went over and leant upon the mantelpiece where she gazed for a long time at the man with the blonde beard, and finally threw herself on her

bed, a prey to a cruel perplexity. Her mind was so absorbed that she repeated several times aloud:

“How can this clown know that melody? Who could have taught it to him?”

For that had been the true cause of the violent emotion she experienced during the act of Michalis and Partner.—The hearing all of a sudden, that piece of music composed formerly for her, and which she thought she alone knew, *since it had never been published and since the one who composed it was dead.*

And now she found herself drawn back, by this astonishing incident, to years gone by; before her eyes lay all her former life with its alternate joys and sorrows.

She saw herself back at Saint Petersburg in the magnificent palace of her parents, on the Newsky Prospekt, at the Court where she went to play with the Imperial princesses; at Tsarkoe-Selo, where she spent long weeks, treated by the sovereigns like one of their own daughters. She recalled the gentle, rather sad face of Nicholas II, the more enigmatical one of the Empress, the little Tsarevitch, so pale and so

pretty, and finally her dear friends the princesses Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia.

One day, in the early part of 1914, when her sixteenth birthday was approaching, the Czar said to her father:

“Alexander Dimitrievitch, you must soon think of marrying off this charming child. I have a suitor in mind for her; we shall discuss it shortly.”

And, one month later, her mother had told her, half laughing, half crying, that she was engaged to Michel III, reigning Grand Duke of Georgevia, that little principality on the border of Roumania, which had since been made into an independent state at the treaty of Versailles, as my readers well know.

A diplomatic marriage, certainly, by which the Emperor tried to attach to himself Michel III, who never came to Court, or left his splendid palace of Tcharkowla, so full of works of art, except to take long trips round the world under the name of Michel Provinkoff—but also a great marriage that was going to make little Olga Alexandrowna into Her Highness.

The Grand Duke of Georgevia, respecting the wish expressed by his sovereign, though he

had, they say, to break off a proposed alliance with a young French widow, arrived a few weeks later at Saint Petersburg for the official celebration of the announcement of his engagement.

He was just like the photograph sent by him formally to the future Grand Duchess, that photograph that she had questioned at length trying to discover in it the secret of her future, and which was now hanging on the right of the mantlepiece in her room in exile.

In spite of the shade of sadness that had spread over his face, and the reason of which she could not guess, Michel III had instantly charmed the Princess by his intelligence, his very varied talents and his artistic tastes. As for him, after a few brief conversations, he had seemed surprised to find in Olga Alexandrowna a young girl with an alert mind, not, like so many others, solely interested in personal adornment and pleasures. Then, having cut short as much as possible the series of "fêtes" and dinners arranged in his honor, he had hastened to return to his small state.

Very simple, an enemy of etiquette, detesting hollow social gatherings where none but

the mediocre, the commonplace and the pretentious get together for worldly entertainment, Michel of Georgevia was happy only in the company of artists. A music-lover—he had himself written a very charming symphony—he received, at Tcharkowla, virtuosi from all over the world, and when an illustrious composer was willing to be his guest, he welcomed him with princely honors.

He left the care of administering his Principality to his minister Yvan Dobrowski and only showed himself to the people on rare occasions, and he never occupied himself with so-called public affairs, which did not get on any the worse for that.

One must explain that Georgevia was, in fact, governed by the ministers of the Czar, and that Dobrowski, a retiring man, almost as invisible as the Grand Duke, limited himself to promulgating the laws and decrees sent from Saint Petersburg.

In the early part of the summer in 1914, Olga Alexandrowna had come in her turn, accompanied by her parents, to return the visit of her fiancé. The latter, according to rule, first reviewed the Cossacks who composed his

guard, accompanied by the Grand Duke Alexander, and the young girl had noticed that he did not ride horseback very well, and that he seemed ill at ease in his uniform. To-day all these details came back to her memory. She recalled that she could not help smiling when she saw Michel nearly unseated when his horse shied.

Then concerts had succeeded concerts, to the great joy of Olga who was passionately devoted to music, but to the intense boredom of the Ataman. The latter would have infinitely preferred his future son-in-law to arrange a bear-hunt for him in the mountains. Therefore, vexed and sulky, he had decided not to prolong his sojourn in Georgevia, where he began to be bored to death at the end of a week, and he made an excuse of the gathering of the clouds which already darkened the political horizon, to return to his own people in the Capital of the Empire.

Olga, desirous of flattering Michel's tastes, had expressed a desire before leaving to hear one of his own compositions, and the young man had hastened to play, one evening for her alone, a melody which he said he had just written in

her honor. She had been infinitely touched by this attention, evident proof that her fiancé, in spite of his apparent coldness, thought of her in his moments of solitude, and his composition appeared to her the most beautiful in the world, although it was rather melancholy and languishing for a love melody.

But little princesses have a sentimentality easy to please. As their crowned fiancés generally give them nothing to assuage their thirst for the ideal, to exalt their soul and to make their hearts beat except the honorary rank of colonel of a regiment of hussars, Olga Alexandrowna considered herself highly privileged to be able to carry away the only manuscript of a melody of which she had been the inspiration. She understood that and felt the keenest pride on account of it. She thought therefore with gentle pleasure of the Grand Duke of Georgia in the special train that carried her home across the immense Russian plains.

It was certainly not yet love that she felt for him,—and that sentiment is banished, in principle, from the unions that the women of her rank can contract,—but a delicate gratitude.

She was grateful to him for not having

coarsened himself, like many of the princes that she knew, by paying court to chorus girls, or, which is certainly more dangerous, to women of society, and also because he combined with his illustrious birth, some very charming mental qualities. Yes, she felt herself particularly favored by Providence, since, in contracting a union which was to assure her of those honors that are reserved for reigning Highnesses, she was also to find the charm of a high-minded and artistic husband.

Alas, Providence, whose designs are impenetrable, was preparing to strike Olga Alexandrowna cruelly at the precise moment when this charming Princess was raising her soul in a burst of gratitude.

It often acts that way with the mighty, in order to show the world, as our excellent Bossuet says, "the nothingness of its pomps and grandeurs" and to teach startling lessons which this frivolous world obstinately refuses to heed.

"Et nunc erudimini qui judicatis terram."

A series of misfortunes, both private and public, was to sweep away the sweet dreams of little Princess Olga, and to overwhelm her with so many trials that she would soon be able

to cry out with the author of the *Imitation*:
“It is truly a great misery to have to live on this earth.”

In truth, but a few days after her return to Saint Petersburg, the Grand Duke Alexander Dimitrievitch was struck down by an attack of apoplexy, while he was seeking, in the company of a certain number of friends and chore-graphic artists, the intoxication of love and champagne to console himself for the eight austere musical days passed at the Court of Georgia.

Brought home raving and clutching in his stiffened hand a lock of blonde hair, he died during the night without having recovered consciousness.

Hardly had the unfortunate Ataman been laid to rest when the war broke out. Michel III, who had hastened to attend the funeral of his future father-in-law, was obliged to leave in haste, in order to put himself at the head of the army, the command of which had fallen upon him by right of birth. The event took him so entirely by surprise that he was forced to lose forty-eight hours in order to organize the little orchestra which he desired to have

follow him on the campaign to charm his leisure hours.

To be just, let us hasten to say that the General Staff had taken the precaution to give him a Chief of Staff who certainly understood nothing about harmony, but who possessed real military qualifications, and that the young Duke was wise enough to realize that he would be somewhat of a hindrance to this ideal officer during the period of mobilization.

The marriage of Olga Alexandrowna, originally arranged for the month of September, 1914, had therefore to be postponed to an indefinite date. She bravely accepted these first blows of fate, and leaving to her mother the labor of lamenting with her friends over the miseries of the times, before a steaming samovar and innumerable little cakes, she took the post of Head Nurse in a hospital for the wounded. The war gradually progressed with the various fortunes that we know. Michel III, the talents of whose Chief of Staff had quickly been the cause of his being placed in command of an army, only made three short visits to Petrograd (such being the new name of the capital) to present his respects to his

fiancée. At each one of these visits, the Czar, distressed to see the union with his little cousin put off indefinitely, spoke of celebrating the marriage with the Grand Duke of Georgevia without further delay, but Michel permitted himself to observe to his Majesty that, in spite of his extreme impatience concerning this union, it seemed to him hardly fitting to consider his own personal happiness while his soldiers went daily to be killed as a result of orders signed by him.

The Emperor had not insisted, all the more because Olga shared the opinion of her future husband, in whom she appreciated, under the circumstances, this delicacy of feeling. She had, in truth, felt repugnance at airing her happiness before so many miseries, and she also sensed that if there is any advantage in being a sovereign, it is on the condition of being a sovereign of happy subjects.

This happiness, alas, did not seem to be reserved for her. The Revolution had broken out, suddenly, brutally and violently. Blow followed blow, the abdication of the Czar, the arrest of the Imperial family and the victory of

the Bolsheviks cast down to the ground the entire edifice of the monarchy.

Michel III, seeing his troops disband, hastened back to Georgia in the hopes of stamping out, by his presence, the revolutionary movement, and the Princess Olga, taking her mother with her, managed to flee from the Capital, thanks to the help of several soldiers, grateful for the care she had bestowed upon them.

Joined by Countess Orchapoff and General Kameniski, the two women, disguised as peasants, turned toward Georgia, in the hope of finding refuge there, but, on their way, a frightful piece of news came to their ears. The Grand Duke Michel had failed in his enterprise, and communists from Moscow had assassinated both him and his minister, Dobrowski, in the outskirts of Tcharkowla, at the moment when he was attempting to sail.

Thereupon the little troop turned their steps toward the North and walking by night and hiding by day, helped by the peasants that the virus Bolshevik had not yet attacked, managed miraculously to reach Sweden.

Such were the memories which, each in their turn, lit up and clouded the face of the charming Princess Olga Alexandrowna, stretched on her bed in her room at the Villa Said, under the ancient ikon of which the dull gold shone under the flickering light of the little altar lamp, whose shadow now obliterated familiar things.

But always, with each vision of the past, this question came back to the mind of the young girl: "How can this clown know the melody composed for me by the Grand Duke Michel of Georgevia, the melody of which the only manuscript is there in the drawer of my writing desk?"

While she dreamed, Michalis and Partner had long since left the Olympia by the door of the "rue Caumartin." When they came off the stage, as they reached their dressing-room, Partner had simply asked his companion, whose eyes were full of tears, "Is it she?" and Michalis had replied in a voice choked with emotion, "Yes, it is she!" Since then as was their custom they had said nothing more. In fact, those two men who never left one another, who

lunched and dined together and who lived at the same hotel in connecting rooms, did not exchange twenty words during the entire day, outside of certain sentences that occurred during their "act." At the theatre, where they arrived and left together, their friendliness, their thoughtfulness of their co-workers, their generosity toward the dressers and the scene-shifters, were only equalled by their silence. "Good morning." "How are you?" . . . "Very well, thank you." "Good evening." "Good-night." were the only words one heard them exchange. When they passed an actress or a show-girl in the passage, they stopped, hat in hand, to allow her to pass; if they heard one of their comrades calling out: "I have forgotten my powder," or "Who will let me have a little grease-paint?" sentences that were heard every evening behind the wings, they were the first to offer what was lacking. The acrobat who was for the moment financially embarrassed, always found in his dressing-room the providential "louis," and if he forgot this little debt, neither of them would ever remind him. They were highly esteemed, but were something of an enigma, living apart from this great circus

family to which they had belonged but a short time.

All that was known about them was that they had made their *début* in London a year ago, in 1919, and then had spent a short season in Holland and that they had played for one month at the Alhambra in Brussels. That was all. But the idea of questioning them never occurred to anyone.

On this particular day, they had walked up the boulevards together without saying a word, and returned about half past six to take a light dinner before the evening show in the tavern beneath the Olympia.

As Michalis, his eyes lost in a dream, did not seem to notice the dish that was placed on the table, Partner asked a second time:

“It is really she, then?”

“Yes, it is really she,” replied his companion.

CHAPTER III

GENERALLY, as you know, when a woman is devoured by curiosity she no longer lives, and there is nothing in the world she is not capable of in order to calm her soul obsessed by the imperative need of knowledge. Princesses do not escape, any more than others, this tendency of a sex that finds so much strength to satisfy its weaknesses, and Olga Alexandrowna was not an exception among princesses.

In this present case, we must admit, there was sufficient to push to an extreme this slight failing of hers.

And after all, is curiosity a fault? For my part, I have never been able to admit it; on the contrary it appears to me to be one of the finest qualities of the human race, perhaps the finest, in any case the most fecund, and if I were to make the plans for an ideal city, I would, in

the first place, have it dominated by a gigantic statue of a woman, shading her eyes with one hand in order to see better, and cupping her ear with the other in order to hear better. On this pedestal would be written these words: "To curiosity, from a grateful humanity." For, in fact, is it not to this goddess that one owes all the discoveries of science, all the masterpieces of art as well as those of literature?

Yes, in truth, when you reflect a little, you perceive that here below only three things are really productive: curiosity, laziness and loafing.

Do not protest, or rather think first of that gentleman who, dreaming on his back under an apple-tree, discovered the law of gravitation, and of that other who, in his bath, instead of washing himself pondered so deeply on other things that he received the revelation of the laws of weight. You see!

But you say you are anxious to know to what measure that curiosity of Olga's forced her. I am going to satisfy you.

Our charming heroine then, after having resisted for two days, two endless days, two frightful days, during which her distraction

brought down upon her a thousand reproaches from her mother, decided suddenly to clear up, cost what it might, the mystery that absorbed her mind, dominated all her thoughts, and troubled her sleep.

One fine afternoon, she arranged so that she lost the good Countess Orchapoff at a store, and then jumped into a carriage and gave orders to be driven to the Olympia, where she tremblingly asked for the manager. She was agreeably surprised, on entering a simply furnished office, to find a charming man of perfect bearing and courtesy.

She had prepared a very complicated story, in order to hide her identity, but she had not the time to relate it for the manager of the Olympia, a Parisian, too well posted not to know the important guests of the Capital, called her at once by her title of princess.

Reassured by this respectful reception, she decided on the truth at once, and it was in strict confidence that she divulged the object of her visit.

She recalled her fainting spell of the preceding Sunday, and rapidly explained that the melody played by Michalis at this performance

led her to suppose that not only was this man one of her compatriots, but that he must also have been in touch with certain members of her family that she had lost track of and from whom she had had no news. She wished, therefore, to have an interview with him, but, in order not to worry the Grand Duchess her mother by false hopes, she wished to see the clown secretly. She hoped that the manager would have the kindness to deliver this message to his employé. If the latter consented to this interview, he was to come the following morning about ten o'clock to meet the Princess on the "Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne," where she would be walking with her white greyhound on a level with the "rue Pergolèse."

Having been assured that everything would be done as she wished, she went away blushing, still quite astonished at her audacity, and anxiously wondering if the step she had just taken was not unworthy of a cousin of the Czar. Her conscience, however, answered "No." For if women much more than men, have the habit of questioning themselves afterwards concerning the acts that their impulsive nature has urged them to do, they possess the marvelous

faculty of always finding, for the most adventurous of these acts, explanations and excuses that relieve their charming souls of the weight of remorse.

Olga said to herself that she had acted wisely, for after all, it was a means of procuring, if possible, some details concerning the frightful death of the Grand Duke Michel and of obtaining, perhaps, some useful information about the great work of restoration that was always hoped for.

From that time on she thought of nothing but the way she would, on the next day, approach Michalis who certainly deserved her benevolence as a compatriot, and without doubt an unfortunate one, but whose profession put him so far away from her. She planned her attitude through the whole evening with that nicety in the choice of shades which is the most absorbing concern of high aristocracy.

Nothing is more complicated, I can assure you, than this delicate science named: "old-fashioned politeness," which consists as much in knowing how to be impolite with tact toward certain people as in being obsequious with dignity toward others.

The Princess dreamed late into the night under the kindly glances of the Ataman and the Grand Duke, on whose portraits the altar lamp with its dancing flame shed a pale light.

This November morning was particularly cold for winter was quickly succeeding autumn. An icy little wind that came down from the slopes of Suresnes, passed whistling through the bare trees of the "Bois de Boulogne." It raised the hoar frost from the branches and spread it in a rain of silver on the ground, then passing through the "porte Dauphine" whirled up the pathway of the avenue, in order finally, to form, in a fantastic circle around the "Arc de Triomphe," the dead leaves whose yellow surface was covered with a white net-work. A slight mist swept over the ground, occasionally resting on the small shrubbery which it transformed into big puffs of rice-powder, and the little streams by the sidewalks resembled long clear mirrors.

The "Avenue du Bois" was almost deserted at ten o'clock. You could only see two or three people walking with a rapid business-like step,

a laborer all wrapped up in his muffler and clapping together his hands on which he wore sheep-skin gloves, a policeman whose raised hood transformed him into a monk, and, over there, on the level with the "rue Pergolèse," a young girl warmly clad in sable, around whom gamboled a large foolish old dog.

The Princess Olga Alexandrowna awaited the clown Michalis. She walked up and down, lost in her thoughts, her heart beating, her throat tightened, prey to an emotion that she could not overcome.

Was she going to find herself facing an old servant of the Grand Duke or one of his executioners?

Would this man show her respect, or else, misinterpreting the step taken by her on the preceding day, would he assume an uncalled-for attitude, or would she, on the contrary, have to encourage him by her graciousness to overcome his timidity?

And while thinking of these things, she reviewed in her mind the well-turned sentences she had prepared with which to rapidly question the strange individual who had been summoned so imprudently.

But suppose he shouldn't come? Suppose he refused this interview from which she expected so many vague and unformulated things?—This idea which had come suddenly into her mind increased her anguish; she walked with a more rapid step, as if searching some means by which she could force the clown to furnish her with the information which no doubt he must possess.

She had just reached that point in her reflections when, suddenly, her greyhound crouched to the ground with a dull growl, and she felt herself held by a mysterious force. She stopped short and turned around suddenly, with the impression that someone stood behind her.

Michalis was standing about three yards from her, immovable, hat in hand, and at quite a distance, like a footman following his master or like a minister behind his king, the Princess perceived Partner in the same attitude.

Surprised, the young girl remained silent for a few seconds. At last, mastering herself, she murmured in a faltering voice:

"I thank you, Sir, for having responded so obligingly to my request."

Evidently that was not at all what she had planned to say; she had prepared a way of opening the conversation that was much more noble, much more "princess-like," but, all of a sudden her beautiful edifice had crumbled and her thoughts had all scattered to the winds, simply because she had not seen the man approaching.

Nothing is so difficult as to keep one's dignity when faced by the unexpected. That is just why etiquette forbids the questioning of royal personages; it prevents them from replying foolishly or from belittling themselves by any awkwardness.

Michalis had certainly not dared to be the first to address the Princess Olga, but she had the curious impression of being questioned by him. Explain that if you can!

Nevertheless, as the clown did not change his deferential attitude, simply replying as he bowed: "Madame may be assured that I am only too honored to be of any service to her," she felt a quieting down of a slight unreasonable anger that began to surge up in her. And then, this Michalis showed signs of a certain

breeding in calling her "Madame" instead of "Mademoiselle" and in using, without lowering himself to servility, the third person when speaking to her. From that instant, she did not doubt that he had been in the habit of appearing in the presence of important personages.

After having begged him to replace his hat, Olga Alexandrowna took a few steps, followed by the black clown who kept a trifle behind her, then turning toward him she asked frankly:

"Is it not true that you, the other day, purposely played this melody that I thought I alone knew. Did you recognize me?"

Michalis replied in a trembling voice:

"Yes, Madame."

The Princess, who had not up to that point looked straight at him, then noticed that he was horribly pale and seemed ready to faint. As his eyes were lowered, she could examine him at leisure for a few seconds, and she was struck by the fineness of his features, as also by the distinction of his face, which the make-up at the Olympia had hidden.

She continued, desirous of enlightening herself without delay.

“How did you know that piece of music? By what chance did it fall into your hands. And first, before anything else, who are you, Sir?”

At this last question, Michalis, whose body was shaken by a nervous trembling that he could not overcome, staggered slightly, took off his hat with one hand, passed the other over his brow and then slowly, very slowly, raised his heavy eyelids and looked with feverish glance straight into the eyes of the young Princess without saying a word.

Olga, troubled by the clown's sad expression and by the tears that she saw flowing down his wan cheeks, did not dream of renewing her unanswered question.

She remained immovable, as if fascinated, feeling the same strange discomfort that had troubled her on the day of the *matinée* at the music-hall.

Suddenly something extraordinary happened. The Princess stretched out her arms, as if to evade an invisible object, and moaned faintly.

There, in front of her, another face, little

by little, replaced that of Michalis, whose lines were exactly like it. The marked wrinkles of his brow disappeared, the feverish eyes became sweet and melancholy, on his cheeks, which now appeared fuller, appeared a well-trimmed blonde beard and a slight mustache shadowed his lips.

Olga Alexandrowna murmured as if in a dream:

“Michel! . . . Michel! Is it really you?”

And her heart having stopped beating for a second, she shut her eyes, her nostrils closed and she would have fallen; but Michalis had rushed toward her and, with the help of Partner, who had also run forward, he carried her fainting to one of the benches in the avenue.

When she regained consciousness, the musician was sobbing, his brow resting on his hand. As she opened her mouth to speak he cried out:

“You are mistaken, Madame, I am not the one you think me to be!”

Then he fled like a madman, leaving to Partner the care of escorting the young bewildered girl to the door of the Villa Said.

She entered her home staggering, went up to her room and fell upon her bed with her head burning, her mind vacant, incapable of replying to the innumerable questions put to her by the distracted Grand Duchess.

A doctor, called in haste, for fear of brain-fever or an attack of meningitis, put ice on her forehead and advised that she be left in complete silence.

She remained prostrated all day, and only opened her eyes toward evening. Memory came back to her then, she searched in the semi-darkness for the portrait of Michel, and gazed at it for a long space of time.

Once again she stretched her beautiful arms out, but this time with a gesture filled with infinite tenderness, for the marvelous miracle was being accomplished for the second time.

The calm face of the Grand Duke changed slowly, the brow was marked with lines of pain, the cheeks appeared sunken and hollow leaving the cheek-bones prominent.

She had before her the grave, half tragic, and strangely attractive face of the clown Michalis.

Then, certain of not being mistaken, she fell back on her pillow and wept for a long time; tears of joy which quieted her poor unstrung nerves and soothed her into a calm reviving sleep.

She was saved!

CHAPTER IV

YES, that was just the way, I can guarantee, without, however, being able to reveal just by what inquiries and indiscretions I was informed about these historical details, that was just the way, I say, that the Princess Olga found her fiancé, the Grand Duke Michel III of Georgevia in the person of the musical clown Michalis.

And if any people pretend that I am making a daring statement, if the "chargé d'affaires" of Georgevia flatly contradicts this fact that I am reciting, (and he will not fail to do so), I shall simply ask those who deny it to tell me what became of the two men who made all Paris flock to the Olympia at that time, and why, since the month of December, 1920, no one ever saw any music-hall, theatre or circus advertisements bearing the names of Michalis and Partner.

To this, I assure you, no one can answer. Therefore, dear readers, do not allow yourselves to be influenced by the protestations of people who are only too anxious to crush out truth, and continue, I beg of you, the reading of this story that still has in reserve a certain number of surprises for you.

The pseudo-Michalis could not in spite of the strange resolution that he seemed to have formed, deny any longer his true personality. At the second interview that the Princess had with him at her house, during the absence of her mother, he tried at first to convince her of her mistake by a most unlikely story, but his emotion, his confused replies, the impossibility of furnishing a plausible explanation concerning the famous melody, everything belied his words.

At last, besieged by questions, unable to resist any longer, he threw himself at the feet of Olga Alexandrowna, pale with emotion, and kissing with fervor her hands which he had taken in his, ended with sobbing admission that he was really Michel Provinkoff, former reigning Grand Duke of Georgevia. But, at the same time, he begged the Princess not to reveal

to a single soul the secret that he had just confided to her, and this with so much insistence and strength that she had to consent, although promising herself inwardly to make him as soon as possible change his mind about this inexplicable desire.

Reassured on this point, he made the following statement to the Princess, who begged him to give her an account of his painful odyssey:

“When I returned to Tcharkowla to attempt to check the Bolshevik movement, I thought, at first, that I should easily accomplish my plans, for you know the peaceful nature of the Georgévians. But, alas, I had shortly to admit that the fight was impossible. New elements from Moscow terrorized the population, and well supplied with arms and amunition, they began to execute all of those who opposed their plots. I was forced to flee.

“One night, after having shaved off my beard and mustache, I left the royal palace with a few faithful followers. To put the assassins off the track we divided into two groups. I went toward the North, accompanied by my minister Dobrowski and a servant. Some officers, with the intention of sacrificing themselves

for me went ostensibly toward the sea. What these heroic young men had forseen happened. Their little band was quickly reported to the members of the Soviet and red soldiers followed them in hot pursuit.

“Caught at the moment when they were about to sail, my poor friends were massacred after having fought desperately. As one of them had purposely kept on his uniform under his civilian clothes, and as he resembled me a little, the assassins, who hardly knew me, proclaimed with pride that they had just rid the world of the tyrant Michel Provinkoff, Grand Duke of Georgevia.

“This error helped considerably to assure me relative safety. They did not search for me any longer.

“During this time, persuaded that the best way of escaping was to throw ourselves deliberately into the heart of the revolution, we set forth, Dobrowski, my servant and I, little by little toward Moscow. I had been able to carry off enough money to afford us a means of existence for a few weeks; so the trip was accomplished without hindrance. But hardly had we entered the city when we were seized

under orders from the Soviets and sent with a hundred other vagabonds to a place several versts away to work upon the roads.

“Lodged in abominable huts, scarcely nourished, and overworked, we then knew the worst of sufferings.

“Soon typhus came into our midst and made large gaps in our ranks; by some miracle we were spared, my minister and I; unfortunately our poor companion, weaker than ourselves, was not long in succumbing, and we buried him with tears in our eyes.

“They decided at last, after several months, to separate the survivors of this lamentable troop and as I had won the sympathies of our guardians by playing popular songs to them at night on my violin, they gave me my liberty and also that of Dobrowski.

“I instantly decided to go to Petrograd, where I thought I could manage to get news of you and also of the Imperial family, as the reports that circulated through the country were very varied.

“To earn board and lodging on our way, we commenced to improvise little shows that we

gave in the public squares of the villages or at the isolated farms.

"I played the violin, I even sang, and Dobrowski, whose talent for mimicry had formerly entertained us in private life, gave simple sketches that made the peasants laugh.

"Well received here, chased off by stones elsewhere, often sleeping in the open air, spending entire days without eating, we at last arrived at the Capital after two months' tramping.

"There we had the good fortune to get hired at once in a sort of circus authorized by the commissioners to give shows for the people, and it was then, for the first time, that we put off our clown costumes.

"This accomplished, we instantly started in quest of information.

"Alas, all that we heard was frightful. My first care had been to hasten to your hotel which I found completely burnt. People whom I questioned told me that you and your august mother must have perished in the fire. My despair was terrible. I fell sick and hung between life and death for days, prey to a delirium which would have betrayed me if

Dobrowski had not taken the precaution of allowing no one to approach me.

"At last, my robust constitution triumphed; I returned to life unrecognizable, ruined physically and morally.

"In order to live, I had to take up my trade once more as a fool; I did so mechanically, for all my rancor, all my bitterness, all my inner revolt had disappeared. The feelings of my own personality no longer existed in me; my soul was dead. I went, I came, I acted as if in a dream, and I looked at the outside world without seeing it. Wrapped in my sorrow, the only joy I experienced was when I expressed by the aid of my violin, the nostalgia of my heart. It was from that moment that the world was good enough to discover in me a certain originality of talent.

"At the end of about a year our circus undertook, under the orders of the Soviets, a long circuit across Russia. * It was to provide distraction for the people, so that they might forget the hunger that was beginning to torture them.

"The halting places of this trip brought us one day to Odessa. Dobrowski, without speak-

ing to me of his plans, for the chagrin which was undermining me had killed my initiative and left in me only an innate fear of action, Dobrowski, I say, succeeded in hiring the services of some dissatisfied sailors.

“One night he enticed me, in spite of myself, to the outskirts of the town, where a little fishing-boat awaited us which landed us, after a very rough trip, at Constantinople.

“The war had long since finished; we were out of danger.

“The authorities of the Allies, on hearing the recital of our misfortunes from my minister, who did not divulge our personalities, authorized us to embark as workmen on a British ship.

“It was in this way that we reached England about the month of February, 1919.

“We went at once to solicit an engagement at the Alhambra in London; our act was luckily accepted and we started shortly after under the named of Michalis and Partner. You know the rest.”

Such was the recital which, with his head in his hands, not daring to look at her, as if he

were ashamed, the Grand Duke Michel made to the Princess Olga Alexandrowna.

I leave you to imagine with what exclamations she interrupted him, and how the tears flowed from her eyes while the hollow voice of her fiancé was speaking. How he had suffered!

A great tenderness suddenly filled the young girl's heart. She would have liked to hold to her breast the poor head which privations and chagrin had so emaciated, and to kiss those large eyes that were burning with fever.

There is no woman worthy of the name who does not experience the need of consoling and of curing, and love is a plant that never really flourishes well except in ruins. When one wishes to transplant it to rich soil it dies there; when one cultivates it under glass it produces only flowers without perfume.

Olga, faced by so much misery, by such terrible demoralization, felt the woman in her for the first time. She understood that she was going to love, now when he was poor and miserable, the one for whom she had felt only sympathy when he was powerful and rich.

But one thing appeared to her as incompre-

hensible. Why had Michel of Georgevia, after the escape from the Bolshevik hell, not stated his name and qualifications? Why had he not made himself known, and why had he drawn into this voluntary shadow his good minister, Dobrowski?

To this question that she asked him at once, so extraordinary did this self-denial and renunciation appear to her, the Grand Duke replied:

"We had on us no papers, not the smallest thing to prove our identity, I feared to be treated as an imposter.... And then... and then, above all, I believed you to be dead, Madame. Honors without you would have been unbearable to me. Too great a believer in God to kill myself, I preferred to await, unknown, until death should liberate me from a situation where nothing could lighten my sorrow. Dobrowski had not the same reason to bury himself alive in this moral tomb; I advised him several times to leave me, to get back into real life, but he always refused to do so out of devotion; and I had not the courage to insist, so fearful was I of total solitude."

On hearing this new avowal of the passion

that she had, without knowing it, inspired in her fiancé, the little Princess felt her heart melt; she let herself fall at the feet of the young man and murmured in a whisper:

“My lord, I too love you. I too have suffered frightfully.”

Michel drew her to him gently, and they remained a long time without speaking, savoring, after so many sore trials, the sweetness of this miraculous reunion.

If, as you see, Olga Alexandrowna was capable of falling suddenly in love with an unfortunate and down-fallen being, it was you may nevertheless rest assured, solely on condition of being able to remember that this man was a former reigning Prince, quite likely to regain his rank tomorrow. Not that she clung absolutely to power! But she felt instinctively that a sovereign is a being apart, who is able to be important among men only in exercising the functions that God has put upon him, since he was not created to have individual qualities, but rather to represent those of his people. Therefore, in the numerous interviews that she

had with Michel on the following days, she tried to persuade him to make himself known and to reclaim his throne.

The situation was particularly favorable for Georgia, freed for a year and a half from Bolshevism, and constituted now into an independent state with monarchical tendencies, was already beginning official conferences with European Courts to find a suitable monarch.

But, in response to each of these attempts, the young girl met with fierce, irreducible obstinacy. In vain did she try to prove to her fiancé by all possible arguments, that he should not shun the duty of governing the Georgian people, citing to him as examples the other dethroned kings whose efforts to regain their crowns filled the world with a vain tumult. Nothing swayed him.

"Why do you wish," Michel Provinkoff said gently, "me to take up again a function that I carried out very poorly before the war, and this too at a time when my ideas have progressed and when I find myself further away than ever from the conceptions of government befitting a sovereign? No, it would indeed be acting

unwisely for me to try to ascend a throne to which I am not in the least destined by nature."

She could get nothing else from him, and commenced really to despair when, one day, remembering having read in Nietzsche, whose implacable philosophy she had studied and loved, that woman was the warrior's reward, she conceived the idea of declaring to the Grand Duke that if he persisted in his resolution, she could never be his in spite of all her love, preferring a thousand times to die of chagrin rather than to consent to disown a rank of which she felt proud to cling to the duties and the shackles in default of advantages and honors.

The hope that she had placed in these tactics was not disappointed. On hearing these words, Michel became pale; a sombre resolution appeared in his sad eyes; he took hold of the young girl's hands and looked at her a long time without saying a word. Then he said almost angrily:

"Very well, it shall be as you wish. I love you so intensely, Olga Alexandrowna, I desire you so passionately that, for your sake and to possess you, I would even make myself a crim-

inal. You only ask me to be King. I shall be King, I swear it to you."

She gave a great cry of joy, and as the young man drew her face to his, she gave him her lips on which he imprinted a long kiss.

While he prolonged the intoxication of this kiss, and while a flash of triumph came over his face, Olga with her eyes closed, saw as if in a wonderful dream, a cathedral filled with flags and hangings, popes in gold-embroidered chasubles, decorated officers, pages, in fact a royal procession around which censers set in precious stones gave forth a cloud of perfumed incense.

From this voluptuously historical moment, whose date she noted with the greatest care on account of the diary that she had planned to write, Olga Alexandrowna took the reins in hand concerning future plans.

The engagement of Michalis and Partner at the Olympia finished four days later and it was decided that the two men should go into retirement in an isolated country spot where they would meet no one. There, Michel would rest

in absolute quiet from his fatigues and his long anguish; he would wait also until nature should restore to him his former appearance, just as love had restored to him his princely soul. That would leave Olga all the time necessary to carry out her plan, and gradually prepare public opinion for a possible return of the Grand Duke, for a beard grows infinitely less quickly than feelings, and the physique of mortals follows but slowly the variation of their minds. The greater part of the time, it even obstinately refuses to change, and in this, we should rejoice, for this inertia of the body gives a certain stability to one's character. Were it not for this, one would hardly ever know with whom one had to deal. Yvan Dobrowski was not obliged to concern himself with these things, not having changed his appearance in any marked way. It sufficed that, for several days, he dispense with the black dye under which he hid the whiteness of his hair which for the act would have been too great a contrast to the tawny color of his skin. He seemed however delighted with this preparatory retreat, and accumulated in an enormous trunk, with a joy as febrile as it was silent, an

incalculable number of books of all kinds even to the telephone directory of Georgevia and the Social Register of Tcharkowla which he had begged the Princess to procure for him at the consulate.

As she questioned Michel as to the value of his minister whose silence worried her the Grand Duke replied:

"Dobrowski is a man who lives intensely within himself. Gifted with a most unusual memory, having seen a great deal, read a great deal, reflected a great deal and retained everything, he will accomplish admirable results, if as I hope I can restore to him his post of Prime Minister after this restoration that you anticipate. He has a prodigious brain of which no one outside of myself has been able to appreciate the genius."

"But," continued Olga, "why was he not able in the past to accomplish these admirable things that you expect of him?"

"He could not do so. Remember this, Madame. At the time of which you speak, Georgevia depended on the Russian government which dictated its laws. Independent and in perfect harmony with me, Dobrowski can henceforth

give full proof of his worth and perhaps he will astonish the world."

Princess Olga, reassured after this conversation, looked at the flat face of the minister with the admiration that silence always inspires when someone has declared once for all that it is the revealing indication of an exceptional soul.

Everything being arranged and prepared, Michel Provinkoff started off with his faithful companion for this indispensable country exile, the last sad halting place of this great adventure, the last separation before the definite union.

He was trembling with emotion on that day. Crushing Olga's little hands in his, he said to the young girl:

"Let it be just as you desire, my dear Princess. But I beg you not to forget that your repeated insistence alone has made me decide to declare to the world that I am the Grand Duke of Georgevia; it is for your sake and in order not to lose you for ever, that I have con-

sented to make every effort to mount the throne. Remember this, Olga Alexandrowna."

But the Princess hardly listened to him, so deeply was she absorbed in the immense enterprise, the weight of which now rested on her shoulders. She had been living for the last few days in an indescribable exaltation; a wild impatience agitated her mind; she would have liked to hasten events and to accelerate the flight of days, and she was champing the bit for she realized perfectly that any premature gesture or any imprudent word might compromise success.

She expended the febrile activity that tortured her in a thousand insignificant ways, going out, returning, sitting down, and getting up, all of which made the Grand Duchess say to her:

"For Heaven's sake, Olga, I beg of you do remain quiet for a few minutes at least. You act like a moving-picture show. You make me dizzy, my dear child."

The departure, therefore, of her miraculous fiancé did not trouble her, for it represented the first act, the prologue, to be more exact, of the magnificent play, of which the epilogue was

to take place in the cathedral of Tcharkowla all sparkling with lights. The joy of seeing the moment of action approach rendered the farewell less painful. On the contrary, Olga saw disappear with pleasure in that forest of signals, discs and posts, the train that carried off for ever the clown Michalis, in order to bring back in a few weeks the Grand Duke Michel of Georgevia.

For a whole month (a very meritorious act on the part of a woman) she was able to restrain her desire to talk, being, for the first time in her life, preoccupied by the capillary aspect of man. She learnt that a beard grows about half a millimetre in twenty-four hours and she had calculated that her fiancé would not have recovered his former appearance before ten or twelve weeks.

I will not relate to you in detail how she contrived in consequence first to cast into people's minds a doubt as to the assassination of Michel III, then how she conveyed the idea to her hearers that he might still be living under a false name in that mysterious Bolshevik Rus-

sia, and then how she transferred this hypothesis from the drawing-rooms into the editors' offices and from there into the newspaper columns. Suffice to say that she displayed, in order to accomplish her aims, such cleverness, tact, and knowledge of psychology and diplomacy as one surely would not expect to find in a young girl with dreamy eyes. She had, to help her in this delicate task, an auxiliary who was all the more useful on account of not being in the secret. I mean the Grand Duchess Marie Nicolævna. It was enough for the Princess on returning from one of her charitable trips to say to her mother: "To-day I saw a man, recently escaped from Russia, who swore to me on his oath that the Revolutionists of Tcharkowla had not killed Michel of Georgia but one of his officers," to have three or four important drawing-rooms notified of the news within twenty-four hours. This report with added decorations then spread quickly into the most aristocratic circles where it was welcomed by those young men of society who add to the insufficiency of their income by the sale of echos or scandal to the newspapers. She had put it over.

This part of the enterprise was not very difficult. But where Olga gave proof of rare intelligence, one might even say of a sort of genius, was the way she arranged the development of this information:

“Michel III had *perhaps* not been assassinated.”

“He had *surely* not been assassinated, but doubtless had died since the Revolution. Some refugees said that this was not so. One pretended to have seen him in a street in Petrograd, another declared that the former Grand-Duke was serving in the army of the Reds under an assumed name, a third had heard it said that he was hiding in Siberia.”

The most remarkable thing was that the young girl finally managed to have these unbelievable stories related by poor wretches whose imagination she worked on by her skillful questioning.

At last, one fine day, one memorable day, the Princess Olga received a letter from her former fiancé. This letter, all crumpled and soiled, had been handed to her at night-fall, she said, by a mysterious, unknown man, whose fur collar hid his face and who approached her

in the street and then ran away after having slipped into her hand this miserable and precious envelope.

I leave you to imagine the sensation produced by this miraculous event, in that charming and child-like society where a miracle is always expected. Old noblemen trembled on hearing that there was on this earth one prince more than they had hoped; venerable dowagers wept with tenderness at the thought of his sufferings; the Grand Duchess and Olga found themselves surrounded by titled youths already soliciting places of honor in the princely house which would not fail to be organized on the return of the Grand Duke after his marriage.

As a matter of fact, Michel announced that he thought he would be able to escape very soon from the communist State, and that his letter would only precede him by a short space of time.

There were a few gaps in all this story, a little haziness, not a few unlikely points, but no one heeded this, for men never go deeply into things of which they are hoping for the realization. And then, in 1920, remember, one wished to believe everything, and novels full of

adventures once again achieved prodigious successes.

An impressive silence, which lasted fifteen days, followed the excitement produced by this news; the Villa Said remained closed to the reporters who besieged it; all of the society people lived in a state of intense expectancy,—in a sort of semi-religious retreat.

Finally the thunder-bolt fell.

Paris learnt suddenly one morning that the Grand Duke Michel III of Georgevia had just arrived in France with his minister Yvan Dobrowski and three days later, they announced that His Highness had reached the Capital.

I should indeed be greatly lacking in consideration if I undertook to describe to you events that you all still have in your memory. I am not one of those authors who aim cynically at one point, and only consider that they have completed a lasting work when they have managed in some way to blacken a certain number of white pages. One should never say more than one has to, and, above all, one should know how to avoid writing useless pages that the

reader will hasten to turn with an angry hand.

And that is exactly what would not fail to happen if I took upon myself to recall the enthusiasm—yes, the word is not too strong—, I may even say the delirious enthusiasm which took hold of the French Republicans when they knew that they had this lost and miraculously found King in their midst.

How many entertainments they gave in his honor! What sensational articles appeared in the newspapers! The “Hotel in the place Vendome,” where he stayed, was filled with a crowd of eager journalists, indiscreet photographers, enamoured women, unemployed diplomats and retired generals.

One could see, rapidly passing through there those men of the world who belong to the class of agitated idlers, who are compelled by decency to show themselves in ten different places a day, and the register placed in the lobby was filled with the most aristocratic and also with the most commercial signatures.

You all know that. You know the rest too—how the Georgevian press, reflector of public opinion, insisted on the restoration of Michel Provinkoff; how, under the pressure of the na-

tions who were charmed with this fairy tale, the Allies gave their authorization; and also how the regent of Georgia came to Paris to turn over his powers into the hands of the Prince.

You remember the elegance and the smiling nobility of the new King, when he went to the "Elysée," in grand Russian uniform to bid adieu to the President of the Republic; you have not forgotten the charming graciousness of the Princess Olga, and the noisy dignity of the Grand Duchess Marie, when you greeted them at the "gare de Lyon" at the moment of their departure. It is, therefore, useless for me to lay stress on these events which, in spite of their importance and originality, constitute the least interesting part of my narrative, as you will presently judge for yourself.

CHAPTER V

GEORGEVIA is a picturesque and variegated country situated on the border of that southern part of Russia which is, in fact something like the Riviera.

It spreads out in its Northern part in vast steppes which, furrowed by streams of water, constitute unique pastures and then it tapers off to a point before it reaches the Black Sea, into which its Capital, Tcharkowla, juts its flowered promontories, and where it bathes its fragrant gardens.

Up there, it is almost Caucasian Russia. Clean villages with whitewashed houses, on the flat roofs of which tobacco is drying, shelter a Tartar population that is peaceful, silent and honest, raising merino sheep, spots of white and black wool which spot the immense plain.

Below, one sees the Orient, a noisy people,

a mixture of Greeks, Venetians, Jews, bastard Turks and Armenians, excitable and lazy, whose loud-voiced women, shod in torn Turkish slippers, slowly drag about their heavy flabby bodies and dark young girls with voluptuous eyes that reveal, beneath their sordid rags, the forms of goddesses. All these people; fishermen, money-lenders, usurers or second-hand dealers devote themselves to the raising of lice, fleas, bugs and other parasites which thrive on dirt, the sun and the indifference of men.

Tcharkowla resembles all the towns on those sunny coasts. Byzantine churches in dull gold lie beside white mosques of which the pointed minarets stretch toward the sky; supple cypress trees wave their dark foliage by the side of imposing cedar trees; magnolias mix their perfumed leaves and brilliant flowers with the oleanders; and, over there, on the rocky promontories, the fir trees extend their branches to protect, by swaying patches of shade, the wild acanthus that clings to the stones. In the streets with low houses, whose second floor is built in gallery shape, one passes rabbis with hooked noses and Greek priests with dirty wigs, then, toward evening, when the fisher-

men's boats fold their rainbow tinted sails, one hears the nasal voice of the Muezzins calling the faithful to prayer.

The wind from the sea sometimes wafts in acrid perfumes from Asia which, on the other side of the dull blue waters, broods in the hot sand of its deserts over its unquenched ambitions as a conqueror and its gilded dreams as a poet.

Under the fierce sun which weakens the body and excites the imagination, the marvelous adventure of Michel could not but be welcomed favorably. In the ruins, in the ghettos, in the rich villas, on the quays, on the squares, in the little narrow streets, they related it for days at a time, amplifying it and adorning it with a thousand details, each one more picturesque than the other.

It pleased the Georgevians of the North, who are fatalists and dreamers; it exalted those of the South, who quickly become enthusiastic.

And then, there is no man in the world who is not enthused by a change of government; it appeals to some with a hope of favors, to others with that of profitable persecutions; it satisfies, to the majority, the demand for

novelty caused by the incommensurable boredom of the human race; it feeds loyalty and gives comfort to opposition; it is, finally, a subject for conversation to those people of the world unfitted for action, who spend their time in words that are all the more precise because of their unimportance.

As for the poor people, whose greatest ambitions do not go beyond the next feast day, they see in this event only a chance for a gratuitous spectacle, or a reason to cry out: "Long live or Down with" someone which is, taking everything into consideration, the crux of all political doctrines.

The restoration of Michel Provinkoff to the royal throne of Georgevia was, on the whole, generally approved of, and the return of the Prince gave cause for rejoicings which happily were marred by nothing unpleasant.

There were, for the ordinary people, arches of triumph, a procession, a Te Deum, fireworks, a military review, and at the Royal Palace banquets, receptions and concerts for the aristocracy.

The Georgevians were happy to find in Michel the simple and kindly sovereign they

had known formerly, and to whom exile had added still more charm; certain people even noticed that, at times, when he did not know that he was being observed, his face appeared wan, his expression became strangely clouded, but they thought that in those days of joy, the monarch was recalling former hardships, and they loved him all the better for it.

The women were deeply moved and touched by the intense passion that the King seemed to feel for his blonde fiancée, the Princess Olga Alexandrowna. In truth, he followed her unceasingly with his eyes, and his voice, when addressing her, became adorably caressing. At every instant he took her hands and raised them to his lips; he always put himself in the background when she was present; he had even exacted that the conferences of the constituent assemblies should be held before her, contrary to etiquette and custom.

The young girl, on her side, was radiant; one felt that she was thoroughly happy, and this happiness made the whole Court delightfully good-humored.

As for the Grand Duchess Marie, she ex-

ulted, she trembled, she raved. She repeated unceasingly to an admiring and respectful audience, the account of her escape, related in every direction the story of the moujik, considerably dramatized, and went out ten times a day under different pretexts, always accompanied by Countess Orchapoff and General Kameniski, just for the sake of seeing her carriage escorted by a squadron of Cossacks.

However, the obsequious acclamations of the public finished by getting on her nerves, and while enjoying the immediate present, she was already looking forward to the pleasure that she would experience on returning as a royal personage to Paris after the marriage of her daughter.

"For you know, Michel," she said to her future son-in-law, "all your noblemen are block-heads and their wives beplumed turkeys; it is only in Paris, I declare to you, that people know how to speak to a 'Highness.' "

As a matter of fact, she disapproved of the democratic attitude adopted by the King since his accession to the throne, but that she never would have dared to say.

Truly, Michel I (when a Prince becomes a King he changes his number) Michel I had proclaimed, the day of his entrance into Tcharkowla, that he expected to be the father of his people, and what was more, in this he was sincere. So he was constantly seen walking alone in the streets and on the wharf, talking to the workmen, to the sailors, to the business men, to the peasants of the market-place, informing himself about their opinions, questioning them on the subject of their trade and encouraging criticisms on his government. He visited the manufacturers and the artists, and had long discussions with them. He took notes, studied statistics and in fact interested himself in everything.

Not only did he encourage them to question him, even when they accosted him in the street, but all those, both Georgevians or foreigners, who wished to have a private interview with him, had only to inscribe their names at the house of the Governor of the Royal Palace.

After these trips or on leaving functions, the King shut himself up with his minister Dobrowski and both of them worked for hours together. From this intimate collaboration arose

wise, liberal laws, often stamped with an audacious socialism which righteous people accepted because they were promulgated with a royal signature, but which they never would have accepted coming from a democratic government.

The communists alone were the ones to complain, for if things continued in this manner, this extraordinary King would soon take away from their party its "raison d'être."

Once again, as before, virtuosi were invited to the Court, where magnificent concerts took place; but, at present, the notable families of Tcharkowla were, in turn, invited to attend them; sometimes even, when in springtime these musical programs could be given under the great veranda of the Palace, the gates were opened so that the people might come and share these refined artistic pleasures.

There was one personage, however, who did not function at all; that was the chief of police. In vain did he respectfully beg the King not to allow himself to be so easily accessible, in vain did he point out to him that the disturbed Bolsheviks had sent agitators to Tcharkowla to stir up the dregs of the population, that inter-

national brood, the vermin of maritime towns; and he showed him the danger there was in leaving the Royal Palace without military guards. Michel I did not listen to him, or rather, only laughed at his fears which he treated as chimerical.

"If only Your Majesty will permit me at least to arrest these sowers of discord," implored the unhappy police-officer.

"Impossible," replied the King, "I cannot violate the laws that I have myself enacted to protect the liberty of the individual. Besides, I fear nothing from these people. Let us work with greater ardor to ameliorate unceasingly the fate of the working class, let us arrange so that each one may have his share of happiness; that will be our best defense. Happy people do not organize Revolutions."

If the Grand Duchess Marie Nicolævna loudly condemned Michel's manners toward his subjects, she did not, however, allow herself to make observations to him personally, nor even to give him advice. She had much too much respect for royalty; and then, her deceased hus-

band, the Ataman of the Cossacks of Adour had in their early married life, by a few opportune flicks of a riding whip, inculcated her with the idea that women must keep quiet when the head of the family spoke. In the presence of her future son-in-law, therefore, she did not open her mouth on this subject; besides, when he fixed his sombre eyes upon her, she was overcome by a strange discomfort, and the words could not have come out of her mouth. She contented herself by making before him, whether she met him or passed him twenty times a day, three low solemn courtesies which caused her arthritical knees to crack, and this was but to demonstrate her attachment to old-time etiquette.

Only, after having thus, for an entire day, restrained her imperative need of criticism, she made up for it in the evening on her unfortunate daughter, when they had both reached their apartments, which were situated at the opposite wing of the Palace from the one occupied by the King.

Then there was an overflow of words, a torrent, or to be more exact, a deluge!

"My dear, your Michel is a madman, and I

really cannot understand how you allow him to act in this manner. One can enter this Palace more easily than a ministry in France; this will get us into trouble one of these days, believe me. I am exasperated...I shall say even more...scandalized. There is less ceremony in this Court than in the house of a President of the Republic. Suppose I told you that, just now, one of those stupid Georgevians, wife of an officer moreover whom I had done the honor of receiving, took upon herself to leave my drawing-room turning her back upon me! ...How can you expect a kingdom to exist under such conditions?...And the courtesies? Have you noticed the courtesies?...A little bob, my dear; one would say that all these ridiculous geese have wooden feet. And the King says nothing; he seems to think that it's perfect. Everyone squashes etiquette here. Well, I, for one, shall not give way, you can tell that to your Michel. He seems upset when I make a fuss before him; I don't care; I shall continue to do so. Even though it does cause me great distress. But I am heroic. I shall suffer for tradition's sake, and I would be willing to die taking this stand for the honor of it!

And the King? What can one say of a king who goes to chat with shop-keepers? Poor dear girl, you will not reign over a people but over a flock of sheep."

Unhappily for Marie Nicolævna, the Princess did not allow herself, as in Paris, to be crushed under this avalanche of reproaches and criticisms. She did not bow down any more to the old comedy of submission. She no longer consented to kiss her mother's brow, saying as she did so:

"You know what admiration your good sense inspires in me, I shall not fail to have recourse to your wisdom," etc., etc.

On the contrary, she could no longer bear to hear one disparaging word about her fiancé, and, from the very start, retaliated violently, not heeding her mother's cries of distress, nor the tears that she shed in abundance.

Everything that the King did was well done, everything that he commanded was wise.

It was simply that the sweet Princess was in love with Michel, truly in love, thoroughly in love like a woman of the people. She caught herself counting up the days that separated her from that of her marriage, and her adorable

face was covered with blushes which rendered it still more beautiful.

She spent hours leaning her brow against the window pane, contemplating the preparations for the ceremony which was to take place in three weeks, Michel having decided not to get married until the social reforms, conceived by Dobrowski and himself, had been realized. At present, now that these had been started in earnest, he could at last dream of his own happiness, and had chosen the date of the 20th of April for the great and delightful event.

Already road-builders were relaying the avenue which leads from the Royal Palace to the Cathedral, workmen were whitewashing houses, or poles were being raised, painters executed allegorical pictures and panels destined to proclaim on the passing of the procession the loyalty, confidence and love of the Georgians. The entire city took on an aspect of rejoicing, and each day, from the country there arrived delegations, laden with humble and touching gifts for the sovereigns.

Thus, right in the twentieth century, there was in the world a happy country, wisely governed, a Princess and a King on the eve of

their marriage who adored each other—an unknown thing, I believe, since the legendary times when fairies intervened in the affairs of men.

Alas, it was written in the book of fate that our heroes should not reach the haven of happiness so easily, and that at the moment of entering it they would be once more assailed by an unforeseen tempest which would break up their beautiful edifice like glass. A new trial was being reserved for them, a trial so terrible, so fantastic, so foolishly unlikely, that I hesitate to undertake the recital of it. I am afraid that the reader will begin to doubt me, that he will accuse me of deceiving him in presenting to him as a real fact and as something that happened, that which is, in reality, nothing but a dream of my delirious imagination. And, nevertheless, I am, at present, doing the work of an historian, or rather, since history is nothing but an accumulation of legends and falsehoods, the work of a sincere and disinterested chronicler. But I sense the fact that many will refuse to believe me. Well, so much the worse;

it is the lot of writers to be considered like entertainers who are not to be taken seriously, the simple-minded public reserving its trust for those who possess diplomas and relate gravely, each in a different way, the political life of all the countries of the world.

I shall, therefore, bravely face the danger, fortified by my clear conscience. Posterity will do me justice.

CHAPTER VI

No, truly, no one could guess what was to happen on the day of the 15th of March, 1921. Even to-day, apart from two or three people, interested in hushing it up, and myself, who find it interesting to relate, no one yet suspects the brutal, rapid and unprecedented drama of which Michel of Georgevia and his gentle fiancée, Olga Alexandrowna, were the victims.

The weather was, on that particular day, ideal; the incomparable weather of the ephemeral oriental spring; the sun caressed with its vertical rays the eglantine and the acacias whose full buds were bursting with a little dry snap. Through the water in the harbor, which had become transparent, one could see the gray sand and streaks of an emerald shade showed here and there; near the beach some of the rocks were surrounded by a pinkish foam; a

light and perfumed breeze seemed to draw in its wake joyous sounds from the festive town that was dancing on the squares; hearts were dilated with the great joy of life.

The King, who had just received a Tartar delegation and accepted its offering of gaily tinted materials, had been obliged to show himself three times on the balcony of the Royal Palace to the peasants of the steppe who greeted him. Then he returned with a joyful heart into his study, where Dobrowski awaited him in order to get his signature to the amnesty, which on the eve of the coronation, was to render liberty to all prisoners, as was the usual custom. He had even laughed heartily when his minister informed him, in a few words, that the Bolsheviki, having wished to organize a meeting, and having been refused all the halls in town by the Loyalists, he, Dobrowski, had immediately offered them one of the hangars belonging to the military aviation corps, and this had somewhat taken their breath away.

No bad presentiment troubled his happiness and serenity. It was therefore, without the slightest anxiety that he gave orders to the officer in charge to show in the only person in-

scribed that day for a personal interview; Monsieur Pierre Ducastel, a French subject passing through Tcharkowla.

The officer opened the door, ushered him in and retired. The King stood up, as was his custom, and the stranger advanced toward him, making at the same time three deep, formal bows.

He was a man of about thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age and rather tall (his build resembled that of the sovereign although he was of considerably heavier weight on account of his stoutness). Beads of perspiration showed on his forehead, which was already bared by a slight baldness, and a small blond mustache cut in the American style, gave a smart appearance to his face of which the fine cut features were well filled out. One could not see his eyes for he wore large bluish glasses.

As he bowed again he shook the hand cordially that was extended him by the King, and waited to speak until the latter said to him:

"You are welcome, sir; may I know to what cause I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

The man then replied in a voice that betrayed no emotion:

"Sire, permit me first to express to Your Majesty the gratitude that I owe you for having been willing to grant me this interview. I have, to justify my audacity in having solicited it, nothing but the kindly protection given by Your Majesty to all artists, particularly to musicians. I am, Sire, a concert pianist, even at times, a composer, and passing through Tchar-kowla, where I have been before, I conceived the ambitious dream of being heard by Your Majesty and by Her Highness, Princess Olga."

"That was an excellent idea," said Michel joyfully, "and I thank you for your charming intention. Not only shall we be delighted, the Princess and I, to listen to you, but, besides that, I would like personally to play something with you. It is too rare a pleasure for me to let it slip by. Where are you staying?"

"At the Hotel Saint Nicholas, Sire."

"Yes, it's the only good one here. I will give orders that they call for your baggage presently, for I want you to stay at the Palace until the end of your sojourn at Tcharkowla, a sojourn which, I hope, will be a long one."

The stranger gave a start of surprise:

"Oh! Sire, you embarrass me. I would prefer, if Your Majesty would consent to it..."

Michel interrupted:

"I consent to nothing. From this moment you are my guest and I shall not let you go."

He added, laughing:

"Besides, it is an order!"

Pierre Ducastel bowed:

"In that case, Sire..."

"Anyway," the King added gaily as he rose, "you will not be at all uncomfortable here in my house, rest assured of that. Georgevia is not what people in Europe imagine, a country of savages, (you know something of it, since you tell me you have already been here), and the Royal Palace contains much to delight an artist, especially a French artist."

He took the man familiarly by the arm with that spontaneity which was his great charm, and led him to one of the high bay windows of his study.

"See," said he, "the apartment that I reserve for the guests of note that have consented to visit the Tartar King that I am overlooks this part of the park, which in my opinion is the most beautiful. On the other side, is the

kingdom of sunshine, blossoms and well laid out flower gardens. Here is the domain of shadows. These cypress trees, plane trees and sycamores, with their interlaced branches, form an opaque dome in which the artist who formerly traced the plans of these gardens arranged one single opening for light to illuminate the ruins of that Greek Temple consecrated to Love that you can perceive over there. Isn't it marvelous?"

"I quite share the opinion of Your Majesty; it is evidently the part of the park most suitable for the satisfaction of a soul that is given to solitary reveries."

"You will find up there," continued the King, "a few beautiful canvases of the great Russian master, Levitzki, among others, a reproduction of the magnificent portrait that he painted of Catherine the second from memory for she would never pose for him, a portrait of which the original is still, I believe, at the Academy of Fine Arts at Petrograd."

"I know it," murmured Ducastel.

"You will also see, in the little drawing-room that leads out of your room, a charming

picture by your French artist Watteau, and, in the study, a forceful Goya."

"One of the most beautiful that I have ever seen."

"Have you seen it?"

"Yes, Sire, during the sojourn that I made at Tcharkowla before the war I obtained, as a special favor, the permission to visit the Palace; it contains real masterpieces, and the Grand Duke, Nicholas of Georgevia, Your Majesty's great great grand-father, who gathered together this unique collection, was a Prince gifted with excellent good taste. He did not commit the slightest error, and posterity has only certified his judgment."

"You are right, he must have been a remarkable man."

Ducastel continued:

"But what is rarest here, to my mind, is the set of drawings by Michel Schibanow, which are to be found in this very study I believe. They are the only ones of this artist that have been preserved."

The King looked at the speaker with astonishment.

"The drawings of Schibanow?"

"Your Majesty doubtless appreciates them as much as I, and I beg your gracious permission to look at them for a few minutes after a lapse of so many years."

Michel I did not reply, for he had suddenly received the impression that something terrible was about to happen.

In truth, it was at that moment that the drama took place.

The man had turned toward the back of the room; he slipped the library ladder along on its rod, climbed up quickly, placed his hand with a decided gesture behind the books on the last shelf, pressed on a button that was hidden in the woodwork, and, immediately, an upper panel of the book case opened, exposing to view a set of leather cases which were covered with a thick layer of dust.

While he drew the first carefully toward him, he said:

"The hiding-place is good. The Grand Duke Nicholas had arranged it for he always feared that the Great Catherine might take away these drawings of his favorite painter. He knew her to be capable of anything to satisfy one of her wishes."

He turned around, and from the top of his ladder looked smilingly at the King.

The latter, very pale, was leaning against the wall; after a moment of silence, he asked in a faint voice:

"Will you tell me, Sir, how it happens that you know of this secret closet . . . this closet . . ."

"Of which Your Majesty did not know the existence?"

Michel gave a start.

"That is to say . . ."

But the man repeated in an assured voice:

"Of which Your Majesty did not know the existence!"

He came down then, approached the King and continued:

"I will satisfy Your Majesty at once, since we are alone and no one can hear us. I know this hiding-place because *I am* Michel Provinkoff, the Grand Duke Michel of Georgevia . . ."

Instead of ringing for them to arrest this insolent man, or having them throw out this maniac, the Sovereign let himself fall into a chair, and then passed a damp, trembling hand over his forehead.

The stranger had now taken off his glasses.

“If Your Majesty had occasion to see me in the past, you will, without doubt, be able to recognize me although I have changed a great deal. If you do not recall me I have here all the proofs.”

He commenced to fumble in his pockets, but Michel stopped him with a gesture:

“It is useless, I recognize Your Highness.”

There was a long, a very long silence. Pierre Ducastel (we shall continue to call him this for convenience in this story) Pierre Ducastel, I say, had placed the leather case on the table and had opened it; now he was turning over the drawings of Schibanow, making from time to time low exclamations: “How beautiful that is!...What intense life!...All the true Russian soul is found in these drawings!”

The King, with his head in his hands, thought of nothing but this Princess Olga. Tears came to his eyes, under which reappeared the violet shade of former times.

Suddenly, he rose, took a few steps across the room, and placed his burning brow against one of the window-panes. Then, at last, he ad-

vanced courageously toward his unexpected visitor.

"I am at your disposal, Your Highness, I beg you to let me know what you wish of me."

Ducastel turned around:

"What I wish of Your Majesty? But nothing, absolutely nothing...or at least, a very small thing: the simple satisfaction of a curiosity, of which you will, without difficulty, understand the legitimacy. But it is only courteous that I first satisfy that of Your Majesty..."

"I beg of Your Highness not to make fun of me..."

"I am not making fun of you! And, first of all, Sire, I implore of you not to call me 'Your Highness.' I am, and only desire to be, Pierre Ducastel; there is here only one 'Highness' or rather one 'Majesty' which is yourself. It is the function which gives the title. Besides, in this very intimate conversation, I think it will be more convenient for both of us to neglect state formulas, if Your Majesty sees no objection."

The King fixed his eyes on the speaker, and

noticed that there was not the slightest ironical smile at the corner of his lips.

Ducastel carelessly helped himself to a cigarette from the royal bowl, lit it, slipped into an armchair, and continued as follows:

“In the first place, my dear fellow, reassure yourself. I am certainly not coming to claim my place from you. Great Heavens, no! And if, as your first words seemed to imply, you should manifest the intention of giving it back to me, I should dash to the station and escape by the first train. On that, I give you my word of honor. I am a great deal too happy in my present condition, and I really have had so much trouble in finding true happiness to consider for a moment the thought of losing what I have had such difficulty in gaining.

“You doubtless know, for you must have informed yourself most carefully, that I never had much taste or much inclination for the position of a Prince. I am both artist and bourgeois, which combination is found more often than you think.

“Besides this, I fell in love long before the war with an exquisite French woman, by whom

I have the honor of being loved. The rank in which chance had unfortunately placed me through birth barred my marrying her officially, and we had formed the plan of a morganatic marriage, when one day, the Czar my sovereign, expressed a desire, a desire which was an order, to see me give my name and my title to the daughter of his old friend the Grand Duke Alexander; that charming Princess Olga whom I had the pleasure of seeing again yesterday as she was leaving the Palace in an automobile.

“Certainly, the fiancée that was proposed to me had all the attributes of mind and heart, all the bodily charms that I could wish for and I could have perhaps loved her, if my heart had not already been won by another. But anyway my heart was won and the wish expressed by that poor Nicholas II, (may God rest his soul) was the downfall of all my happiness.

“I am a man without force of character or will; on the other hand, brought up with intransigent monarchical ideas and forced from my infancy to adhere to the discipline of a

father without tenderness, I never conceived the idea of resisting the Emperor and still less of deserting the post that had been assigned me as did certain grand dukes of the House of Austria who were wise as proved by the events of to-day. I therefore went docilely to Saint Petersburg, while my companion, not wishing to be the means of casting me into disfavor, returned with a broken heart to her own country where she soon had an alarming attack of nervous prostration.

“Then the war broke out and three years later the Revolution. The latter offered too favorable a chance for me not to profit by it. The ancient throne of the Romanoffs’ was tottering, other kings were already shaking on theirs; a shadow-curtain suddenly separated my country from the entire world and the whole of the social order was changed. The executions, massacres, and assassinations, of which the number was daily increasing; the mysterious disappearances, the desperate flight of all the great personages, finally made possible the realization of my dream. For my opinions had changed after facing so many frightful

spectacles of human folly and I firmly resolved to attain my own happiness.

"I therefore fled with my minister Dobrowski, spreading personally the report of my death, which happened to coincide with the strangling of some officers in my house, a strangling which as I read in the newspapers, you had also been able to make use of.

"I was free. During this trip, I bought from a Bolshevik some papers belonging to a poor French business man they had just shot, and I managed without much difficulty to reach Sweden, then England, then France, where I found again the one who my heart had not been able to forget.

"Since I was henceforth but Pierre Ducastel nothing prevented our marriage. It took place immediately. With the money that I had given to my wife at the time of our separation and that which I had been able to send her at the first rumor of the Revolution and that which I had been able to carry away with me on my departure we bought a small house on the Côte d'Azur, between Marseilles and Toulon. It is there that we have been living for the

past four years alone with our immense happiness. I still play; I even gave a concert at Nice six months ago which was quite successful; two beautiful children have been born to us, two daughters registered under the name of Ducastel and who will never know that they have princely blood in their veins.

“You see then that you have nothing to fear from me. Three people only are in the secret to-day: you, my wife, and I. You will not divulge it. Besides if you did so, no one would believe you. As for myself, to prove to you that I shall never change my mind and to withdraw myself from any possibility of altering my decision I shall hand over to you presently when you have loyally answered the question I am going to put to you, the two or three proofs that I still possess of my true identity.

“As for the rest, my dear fellow, you are a much better chief than I for this country. Since my arrival in Georgevia, I hear your praises sung by everyone. Each one boasts of your intelligence, your ardor in work, your simplicity, your goodness and if I have felt remorse for

my pseudo-desertion it is to-day completely effaced."

Pierre Ducastel placed his extinct cigarette in the ash-tray and looked for a few seconds at the King, who, with his far-away eyes seemed not to have listened to him.

He continued, raising his voice slightly so as to draw his companion from the reverie into which he was plunged:

"I have told you my story; it is now your turn to tell me yours. It is in order to hear it that I have undertaken this long trip. In truth, when I saw in the newspapers that I was not dead, I was at first horribly afraid, as I imagined I had been discovered by someone, but I was quickly reassured by the announcement of my arrival in Paris, by the accounts of the entertainments given in *my* honor and by the reading of the interviews I had granted the newspaper men. All my apprehensions definitely disappeared when I learned that I had once more ascended the throne of Georgevia. From that moment I felt nothing but a keen desire to know the man who had just substituted himself for me with so much audacity and intelligence.

"Yes, it is curious," he added, as he scrutinized the king who was turning toward him, "we look pretty much alike; you have reproduced very successfully what my head looked like formerly, while on my side, I was doing my best to compose another, a task in which nature has been good enough to help me."

He smilingly showed his bald spot.

"You look a great deal like what those who knew me formerly might have pictured. An intimate friend would not have been fooled perhaps, but all my friends are dead; you are lucky.

"Therefore here I am facing myself. It is a curious sensation to see oneself thus. Only in your person, I have become thin, and in mine I have put on weight. But what odds, that's good luck. Still I laugh when I think that if I had presented myself in society without proofs of my identity people would undoubtedly have treated me as an impostor. Let us enjoy together, if you are willing, the irony of the situation."

He burst into a joyous child-like, slightly ordinary laugh, which made Michel I frown imperceptibly.

"Come I have chatted enough, I am a terrible talker. Now I pass the conversation on to you. Tell me I beg of you, my dear fellow, who you are, or rather who I am."

As he finished these words, a blast of trumpets burst forth in front of the Palace, and a formidable cry of "Long live the King!" shook the window panes of the study.

The officer in charge entered almost immediately and said:

"Sire, it is the athletic societies of the town that wish to salute Your Majesty. It would be advisable to grant them this pleasure."

The sovereign rose nervously:

"I have not the time! Beg of them to go away."

"Oh! Sire," cried Ducastel, "do not refuse these good people the happiness of contemplating for a moment the man they consider, with just cause, the father of the people, the organizer and the guardian of social order. I should never forgive myself if I were the involuntary cause of their disappointment."

He had opened the window and from the

terrace was already making a sign to the crowd that the King was coming. His face expressed a sincere emotion, and Michel, advancing on to the balcony heard him murmur: "It is truly a very fine thing to be a leader."

When the ceremony was ended, when the sounds of the trumpets, which were going away, faded in the distance, the King came back to the Grand Duke.

"I am not, sir, as you would have every right to imagine, an arrant adventurer, and I shall tell you presently how I was led, almost in spite of myself, to act this dangerous part in which you see me at present. My parents were honorable commercial people, who gave me a perfect education. Having shown a marked musical vocation from my earliest childhood, I was admitted into the Conservatory at Moscow, out of which I brought a first violin prize two years later. Engaged in the orchestra of the Imperial Theatre at Saint Petersburg, I remained there five years, first as a substitute, then as second and finally as first violinist.

"A cruel sickness then came to spoil my

career. A strange nervous depression, complicated by a cerebral anemia, and complete debility, accompanied by a considerable dimness of sight, kept me in my room for fourteen months. The meagre pittance inherited from my parents enabled me to live and take care of myself during that time, but, when I recovered from this attack, I found myself without money and without a position. I replaced several orchestra men in different theatres, I even played in restaurants, but I did not succeed in finding a permanent position. I was beginning to despair, when one day, I heard through a publisher, that the Grand Duke Michel of Georgia was looking for a man capable of making some musical scores, and enough of a musician to transpose certain compositions, if necessary. I offered myself and was accepted. It was then that I came, for the first time, to Tcharkowla."

"I have it," cried Ducastel, "it seemed to me that those eyes were not unfamiliar."

"Oh! I only had the opportunity of speaking to Your Highness once, when you asked me to transcribe a melody that you had just composed. The rest of the time, I was in sole

communication with the Lord Chamberlain." lain."

"Yes, poor Korostine who was killed during the war. All the same your appearance made an impression on me. Now I recognize that wan looking man who kept himself aloof and seemed to be burning up with fever."

The King continued:

"A few months later, the war started. I left in a regiment of the infantry, but my health did not permit me to withstand very long the strenuous existence at the front; at the end of a year and a half after having dragged from hospital to hospital my health was restored. I then knew frightful misery until the day when the idea came to me of getting up an act as a musical clown. I managed in this way, to make a livelihood with difficulty. At the time of the Revolution I was in Norway. In the circus where I was acting there was another Russian clown like myself, with whom I became very friendly. We combined forces and arranged between us a series of scenes which were immediately a great success. After the Armistice we obtained an engagement in London, then in Brussels and finally in Paris. There is all

my story. You see, Monsieur, that it is very commonplace."

"It is most interesting! So then, I am replaced on the throne of Georgevia by a musical clown. The paradox does not displease me; quite on the contrary, it pleases me enormously. You are a straightforward man, having suffered in life, having known misery and having retained from all these vicissitudes with which you have been overpowered nothing but the greatest pity for poor humanity. It is perfect, I could wish for nothing better. But all that you have just told me does not explain how you jumped from the track to the throne."

"It is not, I give you my word of honor, either interest or ambition nor is it even the taste for adventure that led me to this substitution. Love alone is the cause of the extraordinary epic that I have just lived, I repeat it to you, almost in spite of myself."

"Love? This becomes passionate."

"When I was in the orchestra of the Opera at Saint Petersburg, I saw entering the Imperial box one evening, an adorably beautiful young girl. I know there are people who deny what is commonly called love at first sight, and I

myself, often wondered previous to that day, how one could possibly love suddenly and for life a woman of whom, a moment before, one knew not the existence. The invention of a novelist, I used to say.

“However, hardly had I cast my eyes on the one who had just appeared, and who with a bright face, radiant with pleasure, smiled at the friends that she recognized in the Hall, than I felt myself overwhelmed. A mist came over my eyes and I thought I was going to faint. My heart beat as if it would break and a delightful anguish clutched at my throat.

“When I managed to master myself I quietly asked my neighbor if he knew the people in the Imperial box. ‘They are,’ he said to me, ‘the Grand Duke Alexander, the Grand Duchess Marie and the Princess Olga Alexandrowna.’

“At that moment the young girl who was moving about and laughing a great deal, on turning around toward her parents, dropped her gold purse which fell at my feet. I picked it up, and without worrying about etiquette, I went up to the box; an officer stopped me in the passage way and took the purse from me.

"I went back to my place in despair as if some great misfortune had happened to me. But the Princess, leaning over toward me, made a gesture of thanks with her hand, accompanied by a pretty smile which filled my soul with sunshine.

"What can I say to you? From that very day I thought of no one but the beautiful Princess that I had seen. Nothing could banish from my heart that absurd, hopeless love. I felt a constant twinging pain which ended by troubling my mind.

"One evening while hidden in the shadow of a house, I waited two hours in the snow without heeding the cold, in hopes of catching a glimpse of the one who obsessed my heart, I felt an agonizing torpor come over me and I fell to the ground. You know the rest. I recovered from the illness that had overtaken me, but I did not succeed in forgetting the one who had caused it. Fate had planned that I see her again at Tcharkowla, as the fiancée of the Grand Duke of Georgevia and my heart bled once more. During the war I did not stop thinking of her. At the time of the Revolution I suffered all the terrors of anguish.

Then I believed the Princess had been assassinated, and I wept as if she had been my life's companion."

The King remained silent for a few minutes overcome by his past emotion and then he continued his story, relating to his unexpected visitor his surprise and emotion when he saw Olga during a performance at the Olympia, the idea that came to him of playing, in order to recall the past to her, that melody of the Grand Duke formerly copied by him, the fainting spell of the young girl and, at last, following a desire expressed by her, their first interview in the avenue of the "Bois de Boulogne."

"In going to meet her," he added, "I was both joyous and desperate; joyous at being able to approach her, to address her for the first time, desperate, when I thought that after this brief interview, when she understood that I could give her none of the information she counted on, everything would be at an end. To have believed her dead, to find her again, then to lose myself in the crowd and live once more in the bitterness, rancor and jealousy with which I had been tortured for so many years; that is what awaited me.

“A bitter revolt surged within me, while, at the same time, an unformed desire took hold of me to conquer fate and overcome destiny. How can I explain to you what happened then? The Princess is a being of extreme sensitiveness. She nourished within her, against all likelihood, the hope that the members of the Imperial family were not all dead, that the return of one of them would restore to her the position that she formerly held. She was prepared for the most romantic accounts, she awaited and solicited them and believed in them before hearing them spoken of. I understood that suddenly as I gazed into her dreamy eyes, as they sparkled in their orbits.”

“It was then,” interrupted Ducastel, “that you told her you were the Grand Duke Michel?”

“I never told her that, sir, but while she was talking to me a sudden irrational temptation crossed my mind, that of suggesting it, of making her see in me her former fiancé, of creating this image in her brain, and of making *her* say that I was Michel of Georgevia . . . For you must know this: the strange malady from which I had suffered for more than a year had left

me a mysterious power of fascination. I certainly always had a strong will that permitted me to fight against adversity, but it did not demonstrate itself outwardly, as I might say, as it does to-day. From the moment that I got up I perceived that I had acquired the inexplicable faculty of creating around me a magic zone, such as the fakirs of India are said to do.

"It is this power that I made use of when I played on the stage; and if, since my accession to the throne of Georgevia, I may be seen constantly visiting the notable people of the country, talking first to one then to the other, it is not only because I am desirous of filling satisfactorily a position that has been, on the whole, usurped, but also because every individual on whom I fix my eyes is definitely conquered."

"That is truly something very remarkable," cried Ducastel, "and I understand now to what extent you are loyal to me when I realize that not once, since I admitted my true identity, have you fixed your eyes upon me."

"I thank you, sir, for having been good enough to take note of that."

"But did you exercise your power over the Princess Olga?"

"I confess that I did. But hardly had I succeeded in this foolish enterprise, than I repented and tried to efface the vision I had created. Alas, I did not succeed in doing so. This illusion responded too closely to the secret desires of Olga Alexandrowna. In order not to lose her for ever, I found myself obliged to follow the track on which I had so imprudently started.

"That is why, sir I happen to be the King of Georgevia to-day."

The true Grand Duke, who had just taken another cigarette, leaned back in his armchair, and after having reflected a few seconds:

"You have just told me, my dear fellow, one of the prettiest and most touching love stories that can possibly be conceived. It has definitely confirmed the spontaneous sympathy that you inspired in me at first sight. I regret not being able to permanently establish a bond of friendship with you. At any rate, when I return to my hermitage, I shall take with me the comforting assurance that I have been replaced by a man who is at the same time bold and wise,

courageous in adversity, firm and kindly when in command, possessing magic inspiration, a gift from Heaven for those who have to command, in other words a leader. It is, therefore, with the greatest joy in the world and with no regrets that I turn the family papers over to you which I am anxious to get rid of, and which will be of service to you if ever anyone tries to cast a doubt on your authenticity, an eventuality which is certainly not to be contemplated."

He drew from his pocket an envelope that was carefully sealed and placed it on the King's desk.

"Now," he said, "I have but to thank you for this interview which has been a lengthy one. Nevertheless, dear friend, (you will permit me to call you this, won't you?) nevertheless, I have a great desire to accept your kind proposal of a few moments ago and come to spend two or three days in this Palace, so as to live old memories over again before leaving for ever this country to which I am still attached by some sentimental fibres. Be good enough then, to give the necessary orders."

"By all means," replied Michel I, whose ex-

pression still remained thoughtful. "I shall also have need to converse further with you when I have pulled myself together and reflected."

He was going to ring, when Ducastel stopped him with a gesture.

"Just a moment. I almost forgot to ask you another question, evidently less important than the first, but which naturally piques my curiosity. Pardon my carelessness. Tell me, I pray you, who is your minister Dobrwoski? For my Dobrowski is dead. Of that, I am, alas certain, since I had the sorrow of closing his eyes and accompanying him to his last resting place. I would not be sorry to know from whence comes this man who is substituting himself in his place."

"Oh! that's very simple," replied the King, "and I am surprised that you have not yet guessed it. That Dobrowski is the comrade of whom I spoke to you just now, who became my friend when we found ourselves to be in the same Norwegian circus, and with whom I associated later. In the act of Michalis and Partner, he was Partner and I was Michalis. Nothing has changed."

"Admirable, really admirable. Then your Prime Minister is . . ."

"A clown! . . . Yes, sir. But not a chance clown like myself, no, a true clown, a clown since his youth. It is owing to this that he travelled over the world for thirty years, engaged turn by turn in all the circuses in Russia, Germany, Austria, France, England, America, Australia and even Japan. Intelligent, rarely talkative, but very curious, observing, and prone to meditation, he has acquired for himself a wisdom that the knowledge of humanity has been the means of increasing. He is a very good statesman."

"Well, well," murmured Ducastel with admiration, "that is what we hereditary princes would never have dared to do, that is what we *could not have done*; take a clown as a Minister. And, however, never has this country been better governed, never has it known greater prosperity. This war and these disturbances, of which it was the cause, have upset the most preconceived ideas. Tradespeople, workmen even, have become clever officers, and they say that the government of the Soviets has discovered in a Sergeant an ex-

cellent cavalry general. It is not surprising, on the whole, to see a clown at the head of the government of this country. Anyway," said he after a pause, "I do not regret my trip."

He went toward the desk and pressed on the bell, but at once apologized.

"Oh! I beg your pardon. How quickly one falls back to former habits in a place that is familiar."

The officer in charge entered. Michel gave him his orders concerning the reception of Monsieur Pierre Ducastel, and the latter retired walking backwards, according to etiquette, not without having said to the King who extended his hand to him:

"I am overcome by the honor that Your Majesty is conferring on me by granting me this interview, and I beg of you to deign to accept the assurance of my respectful devotion."

CHAPTER VII

WHEN the former Grand Duke had gone out, the King fell into an armchair, and, with his head in his hands, began to dream. A frightful anguish clutched at his heart, not that he experienced the slightest fear, for his visitor had appeared sincere and the papers left by him there on the desk were a proof of his good faith; besides, Michel possessed a brave heart which knew no fear; but this unexpected revelation, the sight of the one whose name and title he bore at present, rendered keener a thought which had already been torturing him for a long time, and which sometimes gave him the sombre air noticed by his intimate friends.

The Princess Olga loved him. That fact he certainly could not doubt. Each day brought him a new assurance of it. The face

of the young girl brightened with joy as soon as he approached her, she leant with confidence on his arm when they walked together in the flowered park of the Palace, she asked his advice on every subject, she listened to him with rapture when, in the evening, he played for her alone on his violin; she approved of all his decisions and the rumor of the disputes she had had with her mother had reached his ears. Therefore, she loved him! But who did she love in him: the man or the Prince? By what was she seduced: by his intelligence or by his physique? Would she love him if he were disfigured tomorrow, would she love him if he were no longer a King?

Such were the questions that he had been asking himself for several months.

Evidently he was in the wrong, for the moment any man places himself face to face with this problem the solution of which can no more be found than the quadrature of the circle, it is all over for ever with his moral repose. Love is a fragile sentiment that one runs the risk of breaking in attempting to analyze it and the heart of a woman never reveals its mystery. And besides, what is the good of

this curiosity? Isn't happiness nothing but a charming illusion? Isn't one perfectly happy when one really imagines oneself to be so?

Even though we should succeed in discovering just how much we were loved, where would be the advantage? Whatever be the cause of it, this research cannot, in my opinion, procure anything but rancor and disillusionment, for it is probable that, being endowed with unlimited masculine fatuity, each one of us would find that we are not loved as much as we deserve to be. It is, therefore, preferable to nurse one's self-respect with illusions which, on the whole, are perhaps very often the truth.

Yes but very few individuals are ever placed in the position in which the good King of Georgia found himself, and one can easily understand that, having taken on the personality of someone else, he did not reason things out like the rest of us.

"For, on the whole," he said to himself, "the Princess knew the Grand Duke, she was his fiancée, and it may be that her love for me was solely the prolongation of her love for him...I do not think so...No...She saw

too little of him before the war and under conditions that were too strained to have been able to fall deeply in love with him. But after all, I know nothing about it. Can I accept the tenderness intended for another?"

These scruples had always haunted Michel's mind, but they harassed him still more now that he knew that the man whose part he was acting on this earth still lived.

He certainly did not have the right to reveal the existence of this prince who, voluntarily had passed for dead, and who was enjoying perfect happiness under cover of a borrowed name. But could he in all honesty usurp with Olga Alexandrowna, whose feeling of caste, prejudices, and inveterate belief in divine right he knew, these titles and this aristocratic past that she cherished in him?

You will tell me that these scruples should have come to him sooner. That is very true. But don't forget that our poor hero was in love, that he had loved hopelessly for so many years, that he almost died from this passion, and that at the idea of once more undergoing those tortures of the past, he, brave as he was, lacked courage. Put yourself in his

place. After all he did no harm or wrong to anyone.

Good, but then why, on the 15th of April, 1921, when Monsieur Pierre Ducastel left his study, did he suddenly experience this imperative desire to reveal to his fiancée the trickery of which she had been the dupe?

It was very complex. An attack of conscience?... Yes, to a certain extent. But above all, discomfort in knowing that in the world someone was posted on this fact, and that this someone was just the one that he represented.

Understand me... Before this visit, Michalis, (it hurts me to have to give him back his name, but however I must do it) Michalis had finished by really developing into Michel of Georgevia. Knowing the Grand Duke to be alive, it was a part that he was going to act; at every moment of his life he would ask himself: "Is this all right?" He would also think, "What does he think of me, the other one, the real one?" And then a new feeling was being born in him—oh! still very vaguely—a feeling that put a flame into his eyes and a slight almost imperceptible smile at the corners of his lips. Having seen "the other," "the real one,"

he felt his strength. Do you understand? He sensed his own value, a very decided sense; he deemed himself worthy of the post that he occupied, and began to find it right and just that he had replaced this big affable man. He saw in this event the will of Providence, and the wish seized him now to triumph for his own sake, to hoist on the shield his own personality, not in the eyes of a people incapable of understanding, nor of those worldly people little apt to sense the beauty of such an ascension, but in the eyes of the one whom he loved and whose esteem alone mattered to him. If she knew, and if knowing she approved, little did the deceiving of others concern him, he would be really *himself*.

While he meditated in this manner, evening had come on little by little, and shadows, without his realizing it, had invaded the royal chamber, a violet shadow, on which trembled the golden glow of the setting sun from which the Sea beyond was burning.

It is at this hour that phantoms of imagination become definite, it is then that everything appears possible.

How dangerous are those evenings in the

Orient! The damp vapor which comes out of the soil and draws with it all the perfumes of the flowers from their half-open blossoms, troubles the soul with a drowsy intoxication, dreams come and go, and alluring mirages dance before one's eyes. There is no tired porter overcome by fatigue, leaning against the bales on the quay, who does not think himself a great lord, no beggar who is not certain of meeting the generous Caliph from whom he will receive a purse of gold, no gypsy who does not count on soon being carried away by a charming prince, no jew who does not see himself a banker, no king who does not expect love. A furtive murmur hums through the darkness; it is formed by the golden words that are mumbled through the teeth of the passers-by lost in their reveries, drawn away from reality and already acting the parts that they are sure of playing tomorrow.

Oh! Orient, marvelous magician, thou alone allowest men to reach death without ever having despaired of life!

The strong soul of Michalis (Heavens, how it grates against me to have to call him this) already softened by the intense emotion that

he had just undergone, was captivated by this allurements like the soul of a poet. It is true that nothing is closer to the poet than the man of action. The former dreams his dream, the latter sees it, which is on the whole the same thing.

So the King came out of his study with his face illuminated by a joyous resolution, like all people who are about to commit a colossal stupidity.

There was a "fête" that evening at the Royal Palace; a concert under the large veranda. Michel I showed himself more charming, more seductive than ever, showering his alluring, smiling affability and the sympathy of his glance on all those present, from the highest lords, officers, artists and notable personages to the smallest tradespeople and peasants, who kept themselves respectfully silent in the park. He introduced with graciousness the French musician Pierre Ducastel to the Grand Duchess Marie and to Princess Olga, and smiled to see that the latter had not been the slightest bit disturbed and had not sensed a trace of suspicion in the presence of this man.

Pierre Ducastel, at the request of the sov-

ereign, played two classical airs on his violin. He was applauded out of politeness, for his talent appeared quite mediocre to all present. In short, everything went off without a hitch.

At about eleven o'clock in the evening when the guests had left, the King, still smiling and sure of himself, begged his charming fiancée to grant him a few minutes' interview and drew her into his study where the drawings of Schibanow that had come from the red leather case were still spread on the table.

The night had become suddenly black, dark clouds chased through the skies, veiling the moon and a stormy wind was coming down from the Caucasus, covering the sleepy town with clouds of dust, tearing off the leaves from the trees, bending down to earth the slender stems of the flowers and carrying off in its whirlwinds the mirages of the twilight. The sewers of Tcharkowla exhaled fetid odors, a dog moaned a death-like howl quite near the Palace.

This brutal contact with reality shattered the confidence of the unfortunate Michalis. He passed a damp hand over his forehead,

on which stood beads of perspiration and he instinctively felt that he was lost.

But you know how brave our man was. His courage even went as far as temerity. The idea of drawing back never occurred to him for an instant; besides, a mysterious strength was pushing him on. He remembered a night similar to this, that he had spent in 1914 under a furious bombardment. As on this evening, he had been afraid, the temptation of running away had taken hold of him; he had resisted, however, had leaned against the wall of a house in ruins and for several hours he had remained standing, looking danger straight in the face. Neither would he weaken to-day.

Having seated Princess Olga, he began to talk as he strode up and down without ever casting on his listener the forceful look of which he knew the power. It was a challenge thrown to destiny.

He once again told the young girl in a strained voice which choked him of his intense love, his deep tenderness, his devotion to her, capable if needs be of being carried to the point of sacrificing his life. He recalled to her the

matinée at the Olympia where they had found each other, their mutual emotion, their interviews, the confession that she had drawn from him, the words said by him at the station at the moment when he was leaving for this retreat which was to precede the revelation of his miraculous return, those words which you certainly must recall.

“Let it be done, dear Princess, as you desire. But, I beg of you not to forget that your repeated insistences alone have persuaded me to declare to the world that I am the Grand Duke Michel of Georgevia. It is for your sake, it is in order not to lose you for ever that I have consented to brave everything in order to mount the throne. Remember this, Olga Alexandrowna.”

At this instant he stopped, nervously unhooked the high collar of his tunic, half opened the window and breathed in the warm night air.

Olga had listened to him, at first smiling, then astonished, and now she remained immovable, her heart tightening, anxious, distressed, foreseeing a misfortune.

He came quickly to her, and then in rapid

halting words, he revealed the whole truth to her, save the existence of the real Grand Duke which was not his secret.

"No, I am not Michel Provinkoff," he cried to her with a kind of foolish pride. "I am more, much more than that; I am a man, a man who clutched at the throat by fate, has known how to fight and conquer. Upheld by my courage, by my intelligence, and above all, by the great love that I have in my heart, the love of you, I escaped from my obscure personality: I have made out of the poor little musician in Moscow, the clown Michalis, a King and perhaps, the best of government leaders. Tomorrow, if you still retain for me your confidence and your tenderness, I feel that I shall accomplish immense things for the good of humanity. I shall gather around me all the men of good will, all the workers, all the lovers of order. I shall overcome these fools who, dishonoring admirable socialism, that true policy of the heart, dream of crushing their contemporaries under the most frightful tyranny."

He talked and talked, caught by his own eloquence and by the enthusiasm which uplifted

him, making his face radiant, that pale face with flashing eyes.

But Olga Alexandrowna did not look at him any more. She had hidden her eyes with her hands after having given an agonizing cry. She did not weep: no, she was filled with shame, a shame which, quickening the pulsations of her heart, made the arteries in her temples throb so hard that Michalis suddenly saw only two bluish furrows palpitating there beneath the strands of blonde hair.

Then he stopped talking and fell into an armchair like a condemned man, for, before she had said a single word, he had understood the sentence that she was going to pronounce upon him.

The Princess had receded to the door, with an expression of disgust and fright. All the prejudices of her caste, all the principles that she valued as the honor of her life, seethed within her and indignation choked her.

Just as she was going out, she turned around and said in a low voice, but in such a terrible tone that poor Michalis shuddered at it:

“Miserable man... You dared... What ignominy!... Leave me!... Fly!... You fill

me with horror! . . . Go away, disappear! . . . I am willing that you should have this means of saving your life . . . But if, tomorrow morning you are still here, confronting your falsehood, I shall publicly reveal the infamy that you have committed. You will be dragged from this throne that you desecrate, and stoned like a mad-dog."

Michalis leapt under the insult but Olga had disappeared and now she ran as one demented toward her apartments where she bolted herself in.

Happily for her the Grand Duchess Marie had gone, after the concert, in an automobile with some friends to have supper on the outskirts of Tcharkowla; she was only to return late that night.

Alone, the poor little Princess began to cry convulsively, all her tiny person was shaken with great sobs. Then when the first crisis had passed, she walked up and down in her room with sounds of anger. A common man had played a trick on her, Olga Alexandrowna, the daughter of the Grand Duke Alexander, Ataman of the Cossacks of Adour, on her, the cousin of the Czar! He had deceived her,

ridiculed her, he had made use of her, of her prestige, of her relations, by the boldest kind of deception, for the most scandalous usurpation, the most monstrous crime of high treason. A common man, what am I saying . . . a clown, a mountebank, a fool!

She tapped her foot with rage and seizing the portrait of the King which was on a table she threw it to the ground, and stamped on it until the frame, glass and photograph were broken and torn to a thousand pieces.

But this person had not contented himself with such infamy; he had done worse, he had used his false personality in order to speak of love to a daughter of the Imperial blood and to make himself loved by her, yes, to make himself loved. For, (oh, how she blushed at this minute) she had experienced for him a very tender feeling.

She wiped her lips so violently with her handkerchief that she made them bleed, her poor little lips that had received the kisses of this monster and that, more infamous still, had given them back to him.

Then she began to weep again but this time softly, sadly. It seemed to her that her

broken heart was flooding her face with her tears. For, in spite of herself, in spite of her pride, her anger, her indignation, her disgust for herself, she could not dismiss the haunting obsession of those kisses whose sweetness still troubled her.

A great despair suddenly invaded her and letting herself slip down on the floor by the torn photograph, she found herself murmuring "What a pity!"

This hurt her so deeply that she searched for something with which she might kill herself. But a new flood of tears overcame her, and she remained there prostrated on the soft carpet of her room, her mind a blank, her limbs painful; the tension of her nerves had given way all of a sudden.

As for Michalis, he had fallen in a heap in front of the door, out of which all of his adorable dreams had just fled.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN he recovered from his fainting spell, the King (excuse me for calling him this but it consoles me a little) the King, I say, got up, rang the bell, and an officer entered.

“Go, I beg of you, and tell the Count Dobrowski to come and talk with me immediately.”

The officer hurried out, and a few minutes later, the Minister appeared on the threshold of the royal study.

“Your Majesty did me the honor of asking for me?”

“Yes, Count.”

Dobrowski advanced; a footman closed the door behind him.

“Excuse me for having disturbed you so late,” continued the Monarch, “I needed to see you concerning grave matters.”

The President of the Council (whom, by the

way, I hardly know what to call, for I am unaware at this time of his real name) the Minister of State, Dobrowski, Partner, finally raised his head with a surprised air; in truth, it had been arranged between his accomplice and himself (accomplice is perhaps overstating things, let us say associate, although even that is not quite exact) it had been arranged, anyway, between them, that even when alone, they would retain the official formulas, for fear of an unexpected arrival or an indiscreet ear. In such a situation, one cannot take too many precautions, can one?

He looked at his Sovereign, but did not say anything. You know that he is not talkative. He simply said, as he put down the portforlio that he held under his arm and as if he had noticed nothing:

"I myself have two interesting communications for Your Majesty."

Michalis remained silent, so he continued:

"First, Sire, the "Chargé d'affaires" of Roumania has just notified me that his government is ready to sign the treaty of commerce that we proposed to him. It is an excellent thing for the country."

"Let us leave all that."

Dobrowski bowed.

"Then, something more urgent, I have just learned through my special police-force, that the Bolsheviks, whose meeting I had the imprudence of authorizing this evening, have the intention of making a display in the street. I fear even that they may push their audacity to the point of attacking the Palace. I was just making preparations, when Your Majesty called me, to telephone the Chief of Police and to the Colonel, commanding the regiment of the Cossacks of the guard. And, if Your Majesty will permit me. . ."

He was already holding out his hand toward the telephone placed on the desk, when the King stopped him suddenly, brutally;

"No, they will not dare! And then, what does it matter to me? Let this incapable and ridiculous world fall after we do. I could wish for nothing better."

This time Dobrowski was struck by the painful intonation of Michalis' voice and as the latter happened just now to be standing in the full light, he noticed that his drawn face reflected acute suffering. Deeply touched, his

old and brotherly affection took the upper hand, and he seized with a spontaneous gesture the icy hand of his friend and cried out, forgetting all etiquette:

"*Mon Vieux*, what is the matter with you. Are you suffering?"

Michalis looked at him for a long time.

"The matter with me is that all is over, Partner. Do you understand? All is over."

"How is that?"

"She knows."

"Who could have..."

"I did."

The Minister shook his head.

"I always suspected that you would end by doing that stupidity."

"I had no right to deceive her any longer."

"That's just your opinion. And then?..."

"She hurled her disdain and indignation at my head."

"I am not at all surprised."

"It was not I that she loved, it was the royal puppet, this uniform that I am wearing, this power with which she is intoxicated."

"Deplorable education! Now, what are we going to do?"

"We are leaving. She sent me away."

"It's a pity, everything was going so well. I was beginning to get accustomed to luxury. . . Well, it cannot be helped! And when do we leave?"

"At once."

"Good."

"The first train leaves Tcharkowla. . ."

"At half past three in the morning."

"It is one o'clock, we therefore have time to arrange everything. Sit down there, and prepare two orders of a secret nature under no matter what names. Sign also two diplomatic passports. I will return at once."

The King, (don't forget that he still was one) the King went toward his apartments. Partner ran to him, placed his two hands on the shoulders of his friend, and looking fixedly into his eyes asked:

"Are you suffering?"

"Frightfully. But I shall be strong. Fear nothing. Do as I told you. I shall see you presently."

He went out, and Dobrowski-Partner began to make out the orders, which shortly would

permit the two fugitives to reach the frontier before the scandal burst forth.

In the other wing of the Palace, the Princess, crushed by emotion, had fallen asleep on the carpet in her room.

In the northern part, in the part that overlooks the cypress and sycamore wood, Pierre Ducastel, alias Michel Provinkoff, leaning on a balustrade of his partly open window, was dreaming of his simple happiness as he breathed in the night air.

At the end of about half an hour, Michalis (now I shall always call him this) returned to the royal study, and Partner, on seeing him, could not hold back an exclamation of surprise. The pseudo-king, completely shaved, had recovered his former face; a striking pallor had brought out the violet shade of his eyes which seemed to be once more deeply set in their orbits. This strong man who tyrannically commanded his brain, was not the master of his heart, and the latter, affected by the feelings

of his soul, was compressed and only put into circulation the blood absolutely necessary for life.

To everyone, save his companion in misery, our man had become perfectly unrecognizable. He had put on a dark traveling-suit, a large hat cast over his features a useful shadow. He held in one hand a heavy valise, and in the other, a violin case of leather which he placed on a chair. He himself went to bolt all the different doors, so that no one could enter unexpectedly, consulted his watch, threw himself into an armchair, lit a cigarette and said:

"We shall leave by the big office door. No one will see us, and the second officer of the guards will take us, on seeing the service papers, for two police agents. You have but to disguise your face. On that score I am not worried: that is your forte. At present, let us talk of the future."

"Worth while, in truth."

"We shall be at Bucharest some time tomorrow. There we can take the Orient-Express."

"Where do you expect to go?"

"To England, and without doubt to America afterwards."

"Perfect, and how shall we live?"

"How shall we live?"

"Yes, for I suppose that you are not carrying off the treasures of Georgevia? Therefore, what shall we do?"

"But, my poor friend, the only thing of which we are capable, outside of governing a country. We shall take up our old business."

"Bravo! On the whole, adventure does not displease me, and I have often been homesick for the circus. I shall go up and pack my bag."

"Don't be too long."

"In ten minutes I shall be at your service."

The good Partner opened the door leading into the waiting room of the officer in charge, bowed deeply, and said in a loud voice:

"Your Majesty shall have the documents you desire in an instant."

When he returned, Michalis was seated behind his desk and was contemplating a photograph of Olga Alexandrowna, across which she had traced these words in her large aristocratic

handwriting: "To Michel, with all my soul." He seemed to wish to burn into his memory that dear image, but his fixed eyes were not veiled by a single tear. He placed the portrait on his desk, went to take a few flowers from a vase and set them down in front of the frame.

"You are not taking this photograph with you?" asked Partner.

"It was not given to me. The Princess wrote: "To Michel" and not "To Michalis."

He burst suddenly into a nervous abrupt laugh.

"Michalis! A soul in the body of a fool, is it possible? a heart under this black costume, who would have thought it?...However, I have been a King...I am a King...I am still the master. Ha! Ha!...What will they look like tomorrow, these imbecile aristocrats, all those besotted officers, all those bloated townsmen, on learning that they have bent their too supple spines in front of two clowns!...Let us taste of this irony, Partner, and let us laugh!...Hold, before leaving, before going to die far away in some kind of a hospital, I want to offer myself a joy. I want to become myself again, here, where men have never

penetrated except with respect and fear. The King... Your King, His Majesty, the supreme head of the army, of the navy, of the magistracy, of the police, the Grand-Master of the orders that you received from his hands, weeping for joy, grotesque puppets, your King, here he is!"

As he spoke, he had pulled his clown costume out of his valise, and slipped it over his traveling-suit. He began hooking around his neck the ruffled collar of black muslin.

Partner was weeping.

Michalis announced in a loud voice;

"His Majesty, the King!"

Then he jumped over the sofa.

"I have a good mind to go thus and review my Cossacks, summoned at my call. What do you say?"

"Keep quiet, I beg of you," murmured Partner.

The clown stopped suddenly; he looked at his companion, and, as if sobered, said between his teeth:

"Yes, it's sad."

He opened the little case that was placed on the chair, and drew from it his violin.

"I am going, for the last time, to play for my love."

He turned the photograph of Olga, and standing in front of her, after having bowed to her gravely, he began to improvise.

The bow glided over the strings, first hesitatingly, then desperately. A song of despair arose, a hurried flight of harmonious sobs, cut by languor, dull wails and lamentations, which were followed by violent insults, cries of anger, in fact everything with which the most tragic suffering could inspire a baffled soul.

Partner, with his head in his hands, listened, transported by the grandeur of this symphony of tears, which rang forth to be lost for ever, fugitive beauty scattered into space, similar to those prodigious sunsets that no painter has the time to note.

Suddenly he got up and listened to an unusual noise coming from outside, first a confused murmur which, by degrees, became louder, approached and broke forth suddenly with the full force of a tempest spreading over the town. He ran to the window, opened it, leaned out, then abruptly closed it again, and drew in

front of it heavy curtains, so as to obscure the light from the room.

There, on the square, a wild horde of mariners, porters, stevedores, sailors' daughters and vagrants who had joined some workmen and students, whose caps and berrets could be distinguished by the light of the torches, were rushing toward the Palace shouting death cries.

Even before Partner could speak, the Revolutionists had smashed down the gateway, and were attacking the doors on the left wing, deceived undoubtedly by the light coming from the apartments of the Princess.

Michalis, lost in his dream, was still playing. His comrade shook him brutally:

"Let us fly! Here is the riot. It will help us, anyway."

Terrified people were knocking at the door of the royal study; Partner opened it slightly and cried out:

"His Majesty is in safety. All resistance is impossible now. Escape, all of you, through the garden."

He closed the door.

"Now, not a minute to lose. Let us make for the offices. Come, take off this costume...

What are you doing?...They will see you!"

Michalis, at the window, was looking at the Bolsheviks; a nervous laugh twisted his mouth; he was muttering:

"Advance!...Burn everything!...Ransack everything!...One man alone could save you, old sickly society, you repulse him. Die then! When there are no more strong individualities, speech belongs to the masses."

But, all of a sudden, his eyes filled with terror. The human tide rushed onward, howling, into the Palace.

"The Princess!...They are going to kill her!...Ah! no, not that!...Not that!...I am a miserable wretch!...Olga...Dearest Olga, here I am..."

In spite of Partner, who clung to him crying: "You are mad!", he was already dashing toward the door, when fists began desperately knocking against it, and a woman's voice, choking with fear, implored:

"Open the door!...Save me!..."

Michalis freed himself violently and opened it.

The Princess entered, distracted with terror: "Help!...Help!..."

Instinctively she had run there toward the one she looked upon as master, and the clown had a feeling of deep pride. Behind her, a man had rushed into the study, pale with fear, saying:

“Here they are!”

It was Pierre Ducastel.

Michalis, on seeing him began to laugh. The two fugitives remained dumbfounded before the transformation of the King into a clown. But they could already hear the rioters rushing into the waiting-rooms shouting, “Death.” A voice was heard, that of the leader undoubtedly, commanding: “This way!... They ran in this direction. Come quickly.”

The black clown had opened the door leading to the offices.

“Go in there,” he ordered. “Lead them in, Partner. The alarm must be given; telephone in any case to the Cossacks. I shall hold back these wretches.”

“They will kill you,” cried Olga, “save yourself.”

Michalis did not reply and contented himself with pushing her outside with Ducastel. As Partner placed himself by his side saying,

"I shall not leave you!" he crushed him with such a severe glance that he gave way.

"Do as I order!"

At that moment he had become King once more!

The Bolsheviks ran in hastily, already a little confused by their ignorance of the places where they expected to begin their work. They were not very numerous. Thirty agitators, determined to attempt everything, were dragging in their wake two hundred villains who had come there to pillage, but who were also ready to turn back at the first sight of real danger. The leaders, sent from Moscow, and the heads of the Georgian party, counted on this bold attack in order to start a far reaching movement. Their aim was as follows: to seize the King, the Princess, the Prime Minister and several other high officials. Then once masters of these important hostages, they planned to establish themselves in the Palace, issue a proclamation, and await the uprising of the country, and, above all, the arrival of the relief forces that the Russian Soviets would not fail to send them, to sustain an uprising that would

appear to be a popular one in the eyes of foreign countries.

It was evidently an audacious plan conceived one evening in the Oriental mirage which, however, could succeed only if carried out rapidly and by surprise. But for the present, the rioters had only managed to get hold of one officer and an unfortunate secretary, personages of no importance. They had expected to find everyone in bed and asleep, but there, before them, a gown had fled through the dark passages and they hastened in pursuit of it with rage, feeling already that the coveted prey was in the act of escaping.

A few had even turned back, others had lost themselves in that vast unknown Palace; certain ones finally lingered behind to force open desks, steal knick-knacks, and slash at the tapestries.

Only a hundred of them arrived at the royal study, into which they rushed howling, after having broken down the door.

The sight that met their eyes nailed them to the threshold with surprise.

In this large room which was illumined by only one shaded ceiling light, they saw, instead

of the terrorized people that they expected to find, a strange clown dressed in black satin, who, perched on a corner of the desk, was quietly playing the violin as he looked up at them with fixed inexpressive eyes.

The first man came to a halt. Among those who followed, some, the more timorous, fearing an armed defence, fled; the boldest, not understanding what was going on, elbowed their way in. The unexpected sight stopped their death cries. For several seconds, they all remained motionless, fascinated by this impassive man, who, turning his face from left to right and right to left, cast over them the sombre fire of his glassy stare.

One of the leaders, finally overcoming the discomfort that was seizing him, cried out:

“Comrades, you have before you the proof of the indifference of the potentates who govern us. While you grieve, while people suffer and die in misery, they think of nothing but feasts and pleasures. Concerts, balls and theatres do not suffice them. To fill their idle hours, now they send for mountebanks. While we believe them to be occupied in resolving great social problems, they amuse themselves by watching

the grimaces of fools. The hour of chastisement has struck for them."

He took a step forward and addressed the black clown.

"Come, you, tell us quickly where the King is."

Michalis, without answering, looked straight at him with his sombre eyes, which suddenly seemed to sparkle.

"Will you answer? I ask you where the King is?"

As if coming out of a dream, Michalis stopped playing and said:

"The King? You are asking for the King?"

"Yes, which way did he go?"

"He did not go anywhere, I am the King!"

A tremendous burst of laughter shook all the Bolsheviks. But he who had spoken first became furious.

"Enough joking, imbecile, answer us, or, if you don't, look out for the consequences."

The clown, without taking his eyes off him, slipped off the table, placed his violin behind him, and, advancing toward the speaker said to him in a thundering voice:

"The King?...And why should you think that I am not he, imbecile?"

The man drew back, Michalis turned on his heel, sprang on the table, and, still impassive, cried out addressing them all:

"I ask you, citizens, are there not enough Kings in the world who make clowns of themselves, for a clown to make a King of himself just once?"

"Well spoken," said a student, laughing.

A workman interrupted:

"Let us not stay here amusing ourselves. Forward!"

But now Michalis was wagging his wan head like a serpent fascinating his prey, and no one made a step.

The clown continued:

"Is it not to-day in all the spheres of human activity, that the fools govern?...What difference is there, in your opinion, between clowns and kings? Have they not both the same function that of putting the people to sleep with stories and shows, of checking their boredom by buffoonery some accomplish by laughter and others by gravity? Clowns sometimes throw balloons into the crowd, and one sees not only

children, but also women, men, and even old people jostling each other to make them bounce, and to play with them joyously. The leaders of the people also throw into the crowd, to attract their attention, ideas which are like the balloons of the circus, goldbeaters' skin puffed out with air. When a clown asks the audience, pointing to "Auguste" who has just played a trick on him; "Shall I give him a kick in the rear?" everyone cries out, applauding heartily: "Yes, yes, and a good hard one." When a King asks his subjects, pointing to a neighboring people: "Shall we thrash them?" They reply in the same manner, throwing their hats in the air: "Yes, yes, and very hard." Only, in this case, there is quite a marked difference between the two men, to which no one pays any attention: the clown goes himself to give the promised kick, for which he may get a good drubbing; the King, however, sends others to settle his quarrels.

"Fool's play, either farcical or bloody. The clown is King, the clown is King on this earth. A clown is this once revolutionist minister, who kisses with emotion the same flag with which he formerly wished to adorn the refuse-

heap! A clown, this deputy, making promises to his electors that he knows he cannot keep. A clown, this diplomat laden with decorations and gold braid, gravely discussing questions of which he does not understand the first word, and who, puffed out with importance, regulates the destiny of nations! A clown, this lawyer, who sheds tears while defending the worst rake! A clown, this magistrate, who acquits the profiteers and condemns all the unfortunate wretches!

“The clown is King, I tell you, the clown is King.”

All eyes were riveted on Michalis, who looked at this minute like a lion tamer, holding his beasts in abeyance. Without giving his audience time to reflect he continued:

“And you, my friends, are you not also clowns without knowing it, who the ring-leaders push into the arena to make you perform dangerous tricks, of which all the success will come back to them... What are you doing here? What result can you draw from this frolic? Don't you perceive that, at this moment, you are bounding and rebounding those goldbeaters' skin balloons of empty phrases and

utopias. But, take care, they contain pernicious gases from which one dies when they burst. Get along with you! . . . Violence never engenders anything but violence. Do not try to impose the reign of your minority on this peaceful country. Enjoy life. You, fishermen, return to your boats which are rocking in the harbor. In a few hours, the adorable day-break will appear on the horizon. Let the town awake singing, do not fill it with silence and fright."

He had taken up his violin, and still keeping his eyes on the Revolutionists, he commenced to play.

"Listen to the song of the town; the women are chattering as they sweep the threshold of their houses, the sailors are turning the creaking capstans, the merchants are calling out through the streets, the bells of the churches are loudly pealing forth, the sun is already making the sands shimmer. This evening, the lads and lassies will dance on the squares. Life is good! And you, peasants, what are you doing here when the birds will soon begin their concerts in the branches? Go and open the gates of the folds so that your sheep may wander about bleating over the steppes. As you lie

flat on the grass watching over them you will look at the golden scarab rolling its ball among the stones. Then, after refreshing yourself with pure water from the spring, you will sleep under the ancient olive trees, lulled by the far-away song of the women washing the linen in the river. Life is good!"

As he spoke, he played, turn by turn, blending them in cleverly one with the other, all the most beautiful songs of Georgevia. A few of the Revolutionists walked slowly out of the room, as if compelled to do so by the look in his eyes; others lowered their heads, two or three even wept, several, at last, recaptured by their daily habits, chanted under their breath the three notes which to every oriental is the lullaby of his innermost dream.

Suddenly, a great tumult sounded on the square and in the courtyard of the Palace; the gallop of horses, nervous commands and a clanking of arms:

"The dream is over!...Fly!..." cried Michalis, jumping from the table. "Fly quickly, or you will be seized. Every man for himself, my friends, every man for himself!"

It was a sudden, bewildered disbanding, all

the more rapid because of Partner who had just come in crying: "The Cossacks! Here are the Cossacks!" less to frighten the rioters than to warn his companion, who slipped quickly into the royal apartments.

Chased through the hallways, the drawing-rooms and the park, jumping out of the windows, but surrounded on all sides, the Revolutionists were nearly all arrested. A few only, succeeded in escaping and hurried rapidly beyond the frontier in the fear of reprisals which they thought would be terrible.

Partner, aided by the Chief of Police and the Colonel of the Cossacks, having taken all wise precautions, calm was soon restored in the Palace, which was surrounded for additional safety by a relay of troops.

It was exactly in this manner that this skirmish took place on the 15th of April, 1921. The report of it was hushed up carefully, and the newspapers of Tcharkowla, under compulsion, reduced it to a news item of ten lines.

When everyone had gone, Michalis, who had been notified and had changed his clown cos-

tume, came himself to open the door of the offices, behind which crouched the Princess Olga, trembling.

“Madame,” he said to her, as he bowed respectfully,” you can return to your apartments. All danger is over. I apologize for not having, as yet, carried out your orders. As you may judge by looking at the present condition of my face, I was preparing to do so when the riot broke out. It is no longer possible for me to disappear just now, and I see myself forced to await tomorrow night before putting my plan into execution. Are you willing to grant me this delay? I shall profit by the happenings of to-day to take different useful measures for the good of the country, and I shall issue a proclamation announcing my decision of retiring into a monastery, and I shall sign a total abdication in your favor. I believe it would be preferable for Georgevia, and for yourself, Madame, not to reveal my identity. You will, however, be free to act according to your conscience. Naturally, no one will see me during these eighteen hours.”

The poor little Princess was touched to the point of not being able to speak. She managed,

however, to master herself by a supreme effort of will-power.

"I thank you, sir," she murmured in a choked voice," I thank you for the composure and courage that you have just shown. You have saved my life, I shall never forget it."

Michalis bent one knee to the ground.

"I have but done my duty, Madame. But since Your Highness is willing to express approbation, I take the liberty, on account of the service that I have had the happiness of rendering you, to solicit your pardon before my definite departure."

A flood of tears filled the eyes of Olga Alexandrowna. She held out a trembling hand to the clown, which he kissed devoutly, and said in a low voice, "I forgive you," and fled.

On the way she met her mother, the Grand Duchess Marie, who was just returning, quivering with a retrospective fear, agitated but triumphant also, for the event of the night justified her predictions.

"Ah dearest, my own darling," she cried, clinging to Olga, who was running, her handkerchief to her mouth to stifle her sobs; "my little girl... what an abomination!... When I

think of it!...the bandits...to have dared! ...It's terrible!...How frightened you must have been. you poor sweet child...If only I had been there...But I could not have been of any use to you...I should have died first... You will tell me about it, of course. For goodness sake, don't walk so quickly, my legs are aching horribly. Didn't I foresee this? But, no one would listen to me, and I am sure that your Michel thought I was crazy...He sees at last where his theories and methods are leading us all! What does he say now? I hope he is going to hang all those miserable wretches, those assassins, those...''

But the Princess, without listening to her, had gone into her room, and had very disrespectfully shut the door in her face, which at first choked her with astonishment and indignation. She cried out, knocked, stormed, wept, nothing availed. Tiring of striving, and as no one in this suddenly deserted Palace rushed to hear her complaints, recriminations and prophecies, she retired haughtily to her apartments, for the very good reason that she was dropping with sleep.

If anyone had been taken by surprise by what he had just seen and heard, it was the musician, Pierre Ducastel, who had entered the royal study behind the Princess and to whom nobody had paid any attention.

As soon as Olga Alexandrowna had gone, he rushed toward Michalis:

"What is the meaning of this shaven face? What do these words that you have just said imply. Departure, abdication? Can you, by any chance have revealed the truth to your fiancée! Can you have committed this imprudence, this folly?"

The pseudo-king lowered his head.

"But, you had not the right..."

"Oh! Reassure yourself, sir, I did not betray your secret."

"Bah! What does that matter to me! Besides I am not speaking of myself now, but solely of you. No, you had not the right, I must tell you! When one has, like yourself, undertaken a formidable work, one does not risk compromising matters by an imprudence; when one is a leader one does not worry over insignificant scruples; when one has chosen au-

dacity for life's rule one does not weaken all of a sudden... Naturally the Princess did not understand. She saw nothing but herself, her pride, her race, her prejudices. Did she send you away? And are you going to obey her, are you going to abandon this country which owes its prosperity to you, these people that place their confidence in you? Well, permit me to tell you that it is a desertion unworthy of you!... It is..."

Michalis drew himself up.

"Enough, sir! I act according to my conscience, and I have the habit of accepting advice only when solicited by myself."

"Bravo, Sire, there are words of a King. But, whether you wish it or not, Your Majesty will remain on the throne of Georgevia. I make that my business."

And, backing out, bowing three times, he went out of the royal study.

What a day! It is very certain that it will never be mentioned in the history of Georgevia, and that it will never appear on the calendar

like the day of the "Dupes." However, it is well worth being related, for I am pretty sure that one would find such a day with difficulty in the life of any existing people. I have tried my best to relate it as simply as possible, so as to preserve in my narrative that tone of truth so necessary when one has, like myself, the perilous happiness of handling a true story, naturally much more romantic than those so-called works of imagination.

Rest assured that I could easily draw from its events that which might make it distinctive, by very fine philosophic reflections, whose stupidity I would drown in a flood of stilted words. That would perhaps win me a literary prize and the consideration of my trades people. But, as, at the same time, I would run the risk of boring you intensely, I do not hesitate to sacrifice my reputation for your pleasure.

Besides, my recital is not finished; I have still time to change my mind. One never knows, perhaps I may be seized in the next few days by overpowering ambition. We shall see.

In any case, to come back to my story, the

day of the 16th of April, 1921, was, in a measure, as curious as that of the 15th, with less action, but just as interesting.

You will find the details in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN the sun, as is its custom, cast once again its golden rays over the Palace of Tcharkowla, it beheld the chief inhabitants, still pale from their emotions, deep in varied meditations, or moved by contradictory feelings.

Princess Olga, near her window, her eyes fixed on the triumphal arches that were being erected on the square, was thinking of this tragic night when she had seen all the officers, bailiffs and guards, crazed with fear, fleeing before the rioters, and when she herself, terror-stricken, had run down the dark passages toward the refuge, and what a refuge!... One man alone had not lost his "sang-froid", one alone had dared to confront the furious mob, and, by his moral ascendancy, his intelligence, and the mysterious strength that was latent in

him, had succeeded in nailing it to the spot, thus saving the country from the worst of disturbances. And this man was the very one that she had, a few minutes previously, dismissed like a guilty valet.

Michalis, in the royal apartments, had begun to compose the famous proclamation by which, tomorrow, the Georgian people would learn of the departure of their sovereign, but his pen soon slipped from his hand. He saw, once again, the Princess running to him crying out, "Save me!... Save me!"... With him away, who would protect her weakness? Toward whom would her instinct, which was surer than her mind, direct her?... Ah! how much wiser it would have been, instead of attempting this impossible dream of becoming her husband, to have slipped in near her as secretary or even servant. He could at least have been able to follow her for ever, watch over her and defend her. Yes, but he would have wished to restore to her the position that she previously held, to enable her to ascend this throne to which she was formerly destined. He had succeeded in this fantastic undertaking, and now, through his own fault, everything

was crumbling around him. He had believed himself to be sufficiently strong, he had had confidence in love, and love had betrayed him . . . Still, Olga's hand had trembled just now on approaching his lips in that gesture of pardon . . . He was leaving and would never see her again, never again would she lean her blonde head against his chest, never again would he breathe in the intoxicating perfume of youth through her half open lips.

The poor King's head reeled, he rested his burning brow on the table, and remained there without weeping, but weak from grief.

In his office, the Prime Minister, between interviews with functionaries who had come to affirm their loyalty, was looking at himself in the mirror and wrinkling up his mobile face in search of the expressions of the clown Partner.

As for the Grand Duchess Marie Nicolaeвна, who, according to her custom was thinking of nothing, or which is about the same, of a thousand things at once, she was passing off her bad temper and her nervousness on the people near her, bestowing on them with

liberality the names of all the animals in creation.

Her exasperation, we must admit, had a just cause... Just think, since her awakening she had attempted to see her daughter but a maid, whose trouble had been repaid by a magisterial blow, had placed herself before the Princess' door declaring that she had been given definite orders that no one, not even her mother, no, not even her mother, should enter her room. A request for an interview carried to the King, received the answer that His Majesty, absorbed in State affairs, could not receive anyone all day. Dobrowski, whom the Grand Duchess had also begged to go up and see her, had, in his turn, excused himself under the pretext of his thousand duties at this very difficult time.

After having called as witness to her misfortune, the impassive portrait of the Ataman, relegated to the infernal gods the Bolsheviks, Dobrowski, the General Kameniski, the Countess Orchapoff and all her civil and military household, proclaimed her daughter an ingrate and the King a stupid crank, Marie Nicolaevna had given orders that her horses be put to her

carriage and her squadron of Cossacks mobilized, and now she was preparing herself to offer up to God, who had nothing to do with it, her grief, her bitterness, her anguish, and her unassuaged curiosity.

Having contemplated this spectacle, the sun continued to rise and began to caress the flowered terraces of the Palace.

“Give this envelope to the Princess, and do not concern yourself about the consequences.”

“But, sir, I repeat to you, Her Highness is suffering and can see no one.”

“And I repeat to you that after having read the contents of this letter, Her Highness will be the first to desire to see me. Go, I take it upon myself. It consists of a matter of grave importance concerning His Majesty the King.”

The lady-in-waiting who had been called by Olga's maid, at the urgent insistence of Pierre Ducastel, hesitated a few seconds, then, finally as he repeated, “It concerns the interest of the King and the kingdom,” took it upon herself to go in to her august mistress, who received her very coldly.

"Since when can people ignore my orders?"

"I beg Your Highness to excuse me. There is a man outside who says that he is certain of being received by you, Madame, as soon as you have read this letter. I thought it my duty..."

"You were wrong! Leave me!"

"Your Highness must permit me to insist. The man asserts that it consists of a very grave matter, pertaining to the life of His Majesty the King."

The lady-in-waiting had deemed it useful, having seen the determination depicted on Olga's face, to add a word to the communication that she was asked to convey to her, one single word, one simple little word which serves to imply such a great thing; "the life"...

She was a woman whose heart had spoken, even chattered, affirmed people of evil tongues. The effect that she counted on producing with the supplemented word did not fail to be produced. The Princess snatched the letter from her hands and read feverishly. When she had scanned the few lines it contained she became pale, rubbed her eyes, re-read it a second time more slowly, then looked at her lady-in-waiting

with such an expression of fright, that the latter drew near, thinking that she was suddenly ill. But Olga pushed her away with an almost imperceptible gesture and sat down to fight against the fainting-spell that she felt coming on, and with her head leaning against the back of the armchair, remained for several moments immovable, trying by deep breaths to bring back calm to her agitated heart. At last, for the third time, she took up the sheet of paper which was the cause of her emotion.

“Madame :

“The reason of the surprising confession made to you by His Majesty yesterday evening, is my secret presence in this Palace. Be good enough to grant me, as discreetly as possible, an interview such as the King would have wished it to be.

“I am Your Highness’s very humble and very obedient servant.

“MICHEL PROVINKOFF,

“ex Grand Duke of Georgevia,

“alias Pierre Ducastel.”

I shall not attempt to describe to you again the surprise, the anxiety, the stupefaction of

Olga Alexandrowna, after having read and re-read these words. No, you can picture this to yourself very well, and I should but repeat myself odiously.

In truth, in a story like this, where the most unforeseen events succeed each other, the obstacle for the author in charge of the recital lies just in that very similarity of the feelings experienced by his heroes. As the expressions and gestures of men are not numerous, the author risks, if he is not careful, spending his time showing people with their arms extended to Heaven, taking their heads in their hands, getting pale, blushing, choking, shaking, trembling, getting faint, walking nervously, speaking in a weak or strained voice, tearing open their collars, restraining the beating of their hearts, etc. . . ., etc. . . ., Having already rather overdone these descriptions, I have decided now to spare you this, and to leave to you the task of placing yourselves in the mental state of my characters.

Olga wondered, as you would have done, if the author of the letter were not an imposter, but she rejected the idea instantly, for in that case, how would he have learned the "surpris-

ing confession of the King"? She therefore gave the order to her lady-in-waiting to show in this visitor.

Ducastel appeared, took off his glasses and bowed:

"Do you recognize me, Madam?" he asked.

She made a negative sign.

He smiled then:

"That's good."

As she drew back a little he continued:

"Do not fear anything. You are not dealing with an adventurer or a madman. I shall have the honor of furnishing Your Highness with all the necessary explanations... But first, will you allow me to take a useful precaution?"

He took from a table the letter he had sent the young girl, tore it into bits and put them into his trousers pocket.

This being done, he gave free rein to his memories, evoking for the Princess, with gay regardlessness, their pre-war meetings, the visit she had made him, accompanied by her parents at the beginning of the summer in 1914, their conversations, and all this with such exactness, with so many details that she very quickly ceased to doubt his identity. Be-

sides, as he spoke, she recognized the intonations of his voice, the puckering of his brow, and his gestures. She had truly before her the real Grand Duke Michel, her former fiancé, but how changed!... She could hardly believe her eyes!... Greater than the astonishment of this unexpected return (she began to be hardened to this kind of thing) was this unprecedented transformation which rendered her speechless. She searched for the elegant Prince of former times in this big, corpulent man; she tried to find in this round reddish face the grave and melancholy physiognomy of the Michel III that she had known.

Ducastel, guessing her thoughts, began to laugh.

"Is it not true, Madam, that the "other one" is infinitely more *myself* than I am? But let us not lose our time. How does it happen that I am alive? I will tell you later. Why am I here near you? To prevent you from committing an injustice and causing your own unhappiness. I have the greatest sympathy for you, and for this Michalis, I have unlimited admiration. You are made for each other, you love each other. Do not protest; I know it.

Why are you withdrawing from the only man capable of realizing your dreams?...Yes, I know, because he was born of the people, because he made himself?...Allow me to laugh. These prejudices are unworthy of a woman as intelligent as you. I came to find you so that you might recognize the fact. Look at me; think of him. I am an authentic Prince, he is but the son of small shop-keepers. Which of us shows the higher breeding? My soul is as commonplace as my body; I have never loved power, I never knew how to command, I never loved anything but tranquillity; responsibilities have always frightened me; when they weighed on my shoulders, I ceased to live; that is why my thin face bore an expression of sadness that you took for a mark of distinction. Free, happy, without cares, I have expanded morally and physically.

“The King, on the contrary, this *true* King, possesses a strong, ardent and imperious soul. He is born to command. He is a leader. Nature creates masters from time to time, those “supermen” that Nietzsche speake of. Only it does not choose the society in which they are to be born. It casts them over the world at ran-

dom. Then, while a little country boy is being born at a royal confinement, an emperor comes into the world in a cottage, a God sees the light of day in a stable.

“You, yourself, Princess, have the advantage of possessing the good qualities and the failings of your sphere, you are a veritable aristocrat in the best sense of the word. Pray tell me, what happiness could you obtain from a failure of a Prince like myself? Michalis alone, this man of the people, who, with a glance transfixes a band of rioters, whose vast mind embraces all the politics of a country, before whom other men bow instinctively, he alone can bring you all the moral satisfaction that you are wishing for. He is your equal. Consequently, give yourself to him. By what right, on account of obsolete prejudices could you deprive the country of its true guide? Did not Marie-Louise, the daughter of the Habsbourgs, marry the little Corsican captain called Bonaparte?

“I searched for my own happiness in flight. I deserted the throne for which I was not made, I fled from you, of whom however, I admired the intelligence and beauty, in order to found a family with a wife who was simple

and timid, whose happiness consists of running her house and raising her children well. I did that without any scruples, for you did not love me, and you even occasionally found me rather ridiculous. Yes, yes. . . do you remember how you laughed when I almost fell off my horse while reviewing my Cossacks with your father? But I was a reigning Grand Duke. I was going to bestow upon you, through a compulsory marriage, the title of Highness. You would have had at the Imperial Court, for that reason, an advantage over your friends. You were grateful to me. Then, what do you not owe the man who in four days will make of you, not a Grand Duchess but a Queen?"

Olga had not answered a word; she had only two or three times during this unexpected speech made a faint gesture of denial or protestation. She was a prey to a thousand different feelings which were not translated in her mind by words. Nevertheless, she listened with all her soul, and the fine things that the speaker said of Michalis seemed to her but a sonorous echo of her own thoughts.

Briefly, the Grand Duke told her how he had escaped from the Revolution, how and why

he had allowed himself to be passed off for dead and finally, why he had returned to Tcharkowla a few days previously.

She lent but a distracted ear to his explanations interrupted by a good childish laugh which irritated her. The abyss that separated her from this man seemed deeper and deeper. At the same time, the fine elegant silhouette of the King forced itself into her memory. He was veritably a great lord! Tears clouded her eyes, a great, deep tenderness filled her little heart, a sweetness submerged her mind, swallowed up her will, a great desire came to her to fold in her arms and rock against her breast the loved one whom she had made suffer; and, suddenly, she was but a loving woman.

Pierre Ducastel seized her hands. He said, and the tone of his voice had become grave:

“And as I, Michel Provinkoff, Grand Duke of Georgevia and master of this State by right of birth, consider this man worthy to bear my name and my titles, as more suitable than myself, to fulfill the functions that fate has put upon me, as I, from to-day, in your presence, abdicate in his favor, you have not the right to dismiss him. I shall beg him to keep all the

things that belonged to me and to play my part; if needs be, I shall command him to do so. If you judge him unworthy of becoming your husband, do not marry him. That is your right. But, in the name of the principle of authority which is dear to you, in the name of the traditions of caste that you respect, I ask you to come with me to express to him your entire approbation of my wishes, for I fear, alas, that he may not be willing to listen to me on your account. Come, Madam."

He drew her gently with him and she followed him meekly.

You surely guess what happened in consequence of all this. At first Michalis categorically refused to obey the advice of Pierre Ducastel. He even held to his decision of disappearing, when the Princess Olga, in a trembling voice, said to him: "His Highness is right, sir, and you should listen to him." As the former Grand Duke was insisting, begging and ordering, he cried out:

"This country has got along without me for

many years, it will do without me very easily in the future, and its prosperity will not be impaired by my departure, I assure you. Anyway, deprived of the motive that guided my actions, and of the one for whose sake I wished to be great, I would make but a deplorable leader. The spring of my will would be broken; I should soon become an adept of that "what's the use" which, at present, is reducing the world to decay.

He turned toward the young girl:

"For I must tell you again, Madam, that it is neither ambition nor interest that led me to act as I have done. It is love alone. I feel for men, too much disdain and too much pity to have ever hoped to command them. When one has, like myself, suffered in adversity from their injustice and their cruelty, one experiences when in power, nothing but disgust for their baseness and their servility. Besides it is perhaps thus, that one acquires this soul of a leader that "Monsieur" pretends Heaven has gifted me with.

"The man who sees at close range, how posts, dignities and honors are obtained, if he

has any pride in his soul, and any honesty in his heart, could never desire any of them. As for the one who must distribute them, he is destined without fail to wallow in the blackest melancholy, on facing these ignoble appetites and these petty ambitions, if he cannot offer in homage to a beloved woman the curved spines of his solicitors. Very rare are they in the history of the world who find happiness in being strong for themselves alone. The greater number of the maniacs of power have fallen into folly, vice, or mysticism. The echo of the Escurials is still repeating their cries as of the damned, their martyr wails. A sceptre, whatever it may be, always finishes by crushing you, if two little white hands do not help you to carry it."

Thus spoke the clown Michalis, King of Georgevia, and the Princess Olga, daughter of the Grand Duke Alexander Dimitrievitch, cousin of the Czar, replied by letting herself fall into his arms, before Michel Provinkoff, French musician, very proud of the first act of authority that he had ever been capable of, and which would be probably the last in his life.

If you are astonished at this sudden change in our dear Princess, at this spontaneous abdication of the principles that she had made the rule of her life, it is because you do not understand anything about a woman in love.

Woman, what an admirable being! While a man is able to love beneath him and remain clear-sighted, she, on the contrary, can only give herself up to someone greater than herself. Then, when it happens that her heart is captivated by a man socially and morally her inferior, well, she raises him, that's all. She adorns him with all the qualities that he should have, she reforms the injustice of fate, she fills with tenderness all the gaps, she lowers herself, if needs be, in order not to tower over the one she has chosen for a master. Do not be surprised then, if, after a first movement of revolt, Olga had created for herself a veritable King out of this Michalis that she adored.

From that moment, everything went beautifully. Michel I, triumphant (I restore this name to him with pleasure) tore up the proclamation that he had commenced to write; Partner, once again Dobrowski, burned the order and the two passports prepared the night be-

fore. The rioters who had been arrested, were, that very evening, taken to the frontier and expelled from Georgevia. The greater part of them were foreigners; the others received a sum of money sufficient for them to be, without material worry, good Revolutionaries.

Princess Olga went happily to find her mother, who was still annoyed, threw herself joyously into her arms, and said to her:

“Little Mother, don’t be angry. I will now tell you the reason of my bad temper this morning, and explain why the King and I remained shut, up, each in our own rooms. Well, this is it...I was sulking...yes, I was sulking. Michel obstinately refused to obey a wish that I had expressed to him, a whim, to be more exact. We quarrelled for the first time, and a little tiff separated us. That could not last. You know what a wonderful man my fiancé is! He gave in. Now this little cloud has disappeared.”

“What was this whim, my darling child?”

“You will scold me. I had asked the King to sacrifice his beard and mustache for my sake, as I thought it would be infinitely more becoming to him.”

"Is it possible? What real childishness! And did he do it?"

"Yes, little Mother. Come and see how well it suits him."

Marie Nicolaevna hastened in to see her august son-in-law, uttered childish exclamations of delight and declared that he looked ten years younger, and flew to announce the news to the entire Court.

Some articles appeared in the newspapers concerning this touching, intimate event. The official photographer quickly made a new portrait of the sovereign which the illustrated magazines reproduced, accompanied by flattering comments. All the country agreed that they thought Michel's head not only looked handsomer this way, but that it expressed more force of character. This anxiety to obey the future Queen moved the women of Georgia to tears, and was the cause of many poor husbands hearing this repeated more than a hundred times: "You would never have done a thing like that!" In short, the King won thereby new popularity.

Everyone was happy, especially Pierre Ducastel, who, each day, put himself at the head

of the popular masses who came to hail their monarch. When the latter appeared on the Palace balcony with the smiling Princess, the good fellow wept for joy, and that obliged him to keep wiping the glasses of his blue spectacles.

CHAPTER X

THE 20th of April, 1921. A Feast day, a day of joy, which will always remain memorable in the History of Georgevia.

From daybreak the troops had stationed themselves in front of the Royal Palace, and all along the main street leading to the Cathedral, whose gilded dome crowned by the double orthodox cross shone under the radiant beams of a brilliant sun.

Behind the lines of soldiers, a compact crowd of variegated colored costumes waited patiently, eating oranges or occasionally refreshing themselves at the lemonade urns which the vendors carried around on their backs. The delegations were massing themselves at their designated posts; old wounded fighters from the world-war, Christian Societies, Israelite communities, Musulman peasants, children

from both secular and religious schools, sailors, the Chamber of Commerce, athletic societies, school teachers, judges, lawyers, notaries, etc., etc.

Suddenly, at half past ten, very punctually, the batteries placed on the neighboring hills and the war-ships in the harbor, commenced firing the official salutes, and the expected procession made its appearance.

A squadron of red Cossacks mounted on black horses led.

Behind, came the General in command of Tcharkowla followed by his staff, a group of field batteries with their cannon decorated with garlands of flowers, batallions of the principal regiments of the infantry, then, preceded by their dragomans, the carriages of the plenipotentiary ministers and consuls from foreign States, then the former Regent, now the Grand Chancellor of Georgevia, carrying the royal banner, his horse caracoling in front of a group of princes and barons dressed in the old national costume, and finally, escorted by the Cossacks of the Guard, black on white horses, the Court carriages moving under a shower of flowers. In the first was the Princess Olga

smiling graciously at the crowd, and the Grand Duchess Marie, who bowed to the right and left as if the wishes and acclamations were addressed to her. In front of them sat Countess Orchapoff, red as a peony, and General Kameniski crushed under a beplumed helmet and much hampered by an enormous sword that he did not know where to put, so as not to get it in the way of the future Queen.

The King, with Dobrowski facing him, occupied the second carriage. He wore with elegance a General's costume, across which was the "Cordon" of the order of Saint Nicholas, and waved his hand to the delirious populace, from which came cries in volleys of "Long live Michel I," "Long live the King," "Long life to our Father."

At the entrance to the Cathedral, the clergy with mitres studded with precious stones, their stoles and chasubles embroidered in silver and gold, and holding venerable ikons in cloths of silk, awaited the sovereigns.

The Archimandrite raised the King who had knelt, then led him by the hand to the chancel where the monarch placed himself, accompanied by Olga Alexandrowna, under a dais of

red velvet, and the ceremony commenced, the two ceremonies, to speak more exactly; that of the marriage and that of the crowning.

Our little Princess was living through her beautiful dream. She was, at last in the sumptuous church all sparkling with lights, in the midst of clouds of incense, amid the harmonious peals sent forth over the aristocratic assembly by the sonorous organ. It was truly with a transport of joy that she pronounced the sacramental "Yes."

The rings exchanged, the Archimandrite celebrated Mass, then took, after having blessed them, the crowns that were on the altar.

Michel had risen; he came in front of the prelate, bowed under the benediction, and taking the royal crown, placed it between the hands of the Princess Olga, before whom he slowly knelt, indicating in this manner that he wished to be crowned by her alone.

This pretty gesture moved the respectfully silent congregation. All the glances were fixed on the young girl, and all eyes filled with tears when they saw her gently place the emblem of power on Michel's head, then allow her two

hands to glide with the same movement down the King's face in a loving caress.

Michel rose, triumphant, and, in his turn, crowned her who was to unite her life with his.

The vast nave of the church resounded then with enthusiastic acclamations. But silence was once more established when, up above, in the choir of the organist, a violin played the melody dedicated to the Princess Olga.

It was Michel Provinkoff who with a hand trembling with emotion, was saluting the clown Michalis with his bow.

At last, standing on the highest step of the altar, the Archimandrite spoke.

He was a majestic old man with thin hair, whose full white beard covered his chest and stomach. He had, all over the country, a great reputation for wisdom and holiness. They even said that he conversed with God himself during the long retreats that he made twice a year in the monastery Saint George built on an immense rocky boulder, to which one ascends by means of a basket hoisted by a pulley.

He spoke.

At first he conveyed to the newly married couple the ardent wishes formed for them by the Georgian people, touched by the constancy and the ardor of their magnificent love, that unique love which never despairs in spite of trials and the cruellest of separations. He enumerated in excellent terms the virtues and graces of Her Very Gracious Majesty, the Queen Olga, evoked the noble face of the Grand Duke Alexander Dimitrievitch, Ataman of the Cossacks of Adour, without, however, speaking of his death, praised the energy, the courage, and the admirable "sang-froid" of the Grand Duchess Marie, and knew, with tact, in well chosen words, how to recall the moving story of the moujik or, at least, the official version established after numerous variations, by Marie Nicolaevna herself.

This being done, he undertook the praise or rather the exaltation of Michel I, King of Georgia.

His voice rose, his gestures became more expansive, and it was with an almost sacred emotion that he cried out:

"As for you, Sire, you nobly continue a long tradition of honor and duty. After having

borne with heroic heart, the physical and moral sufferings that it has pleased Providence, whose designs are impenetrable, to impose upon you, after having sounded without ever weakening, the depths of human misery, you have at last come back to the throne of your fathers, recalled by the love of your subjects who have been deprived only too long of their true leader.

“Formerly, faithful to the vow which has for centuries bound your august family to the Czar of Russia (may Our Lord grant him eternal happiness) you directed with wisdom our little country in the general harmony of the empire. Now that it finds itself separated from that great sister nation plunged into misery and anarchy by a band of unscrupulous adventurers, you have, with a deep sense of the necessities of the moment, created a new government, assuring our people of liberty through established order and discipline. Conscious of the duties that God has imposed upon you from your birth, you consecrate all your prodigious intelligence, your untiring activity, the resources of your infinite goodness to the happiness of the country over which the all-powerful

God has delegated you the right of command. You wished that your personal happiness be assured only after that of the State, and it is owing to that, Sire, that we recognize in you the truly elect of the Creator.

“Ah! before the undeniable example that Your Majesty gives, how those theories of the fools who deny the divine nature of royalty crumble piteously, how puerile do these men appear who are not willing to admit the reality of atavism and the strength of tradition!

“Without detracting in the slightest from your personal merits, Sire, you will permit me to ask the world if Your Majesty would be what you are without the long line of forefathers that have preceded you, without your venerable father who, for thirty years, governed Georgevia, wisely avoiding all the things that might have become memorable, without your unforgettable grand-father who, during the Crimean war, bore defeat nobly, knowing, like the celebrated Roman, how never to despair of the country, without your great-grandfather, who had the honor of assisting, by the side of the Czar Alexander, at the crushing of the French usurper named Na-

poleon, without your great-great-grandfather, whose exceptional merits were savoured and appreciated by the Great Catherine... But, I must stop, Sire, for it would take me hours and hours to complete the catalogue of glories belonging to your illustrious family. You are the result of all the merits and of all the experiences of all that nobility. That is why Your Majesty handles with such ease the burden of power, so heavy in inexperienced hands.

“May Christ, before whom you are kneeling at this moment grant Your Majesty a son worthy of you, worthy of all the Provinkoffs, to continue to the end of the centuries the beautiful royal tradition, and so that Georgevia may be ever preserved from Republican utopias.

“Amen.”

THE END

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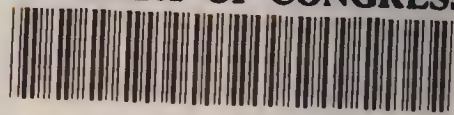
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